RUTH MAXWELL.

VOL. III.

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BY

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"CLAUDE," "HELEN'S FIRST LOVE,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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RUTH MAXWELL.

CHAPTER I.

THE news of Miss Powys's engagement to her cousin, Mr. Beaumont, spread far and wide. In her own immediate neighbourhood it had always been expected that the cousins were destined to marry, and unite the two large properties which respectively belonged to each, and for the most part it was considered right and suitable. Still there were a few dissenting voices on the subject, and amongst them might be reckoned those of the family who lived nearest to Rhys Castle. This family was absent during the Winter at the time when

Gwendoline, with her cousins, came home.

General Winyard, with his wife and daughters, had been abroad some months, and only returned with the commencement of Spring. By that time Gwendoline had become used to the novelty of her situation as an engaged young lady, and to the bliss of knowing she was the chosen wife of her all-perfect and much-loved cousin Louis. The wooing had perhaps been somewhat hasty in its beginning, and her fate rather rapidly decided in the few words that had passed between her and Louis on the occasion of delivering her father's letter. But the subject was by no means new to Gwendoline, and her pure, innocent heart was ready to surrender itself into her cousin's keeping as soon as the gift was demanded.

Louis's proposal—such as it was—came, backed with all the force of parental sanction and warm approval. But that provision in no way desired to interfere with

the free choice of either of the cousins. In the letter addressed to Mr. Beaumont, the parental consent was given, in case of Louis's wishes tending in that direction. If they did not, the enclosed letter to the daughter was to be destroyed. But if his nephew's feelings inclined him to give the letter, Gwendoline was still to be considered free either to accept or refuse her cousin's offer. All that her father desired was to testify his sincere approval and entire consent in case of the cousins wishing to marry.

Louis Beaumont had made his own determination very rapidly—he gave himself no time to consider; and his cousin's acceptance followed as quickly. Thus, without much previous intention, they became engaged, and the rejoicing was, or appeared to be, universal.

General Winyard was an old and intimate friend of Colonel B. Powys, and he was

not ignorant of his wish respecting his nephew and his only child. Still he did not approve—he was one of the many who object to cousins' marriages; and fancied he saw in his friend's anxiety for the match an equally strong desire that the two large properties should be thus united.

"Besides, Mary," said the General to his wife, and sole confidante, "the child is so young, and has been so entirely shut up with her cousins hitherto, how can she tell whom or what she really likes?"

"If she knows she likes her cousin well enough to marry him, perhaps that's enough; and we know Louis Beaumont is very likable, and a likely person to win a girl's love. And as to being so young, why, Gwendoline must be nineteen now—by the way, she was to be considered of age then, and that I daresay has brought them down here at this time."

"Ah! there was another error poor Beau-

mont committed"—(General Winyard always called his friend by the name Beaumont, after he had taken that of Powys, for their acquaintance dated from a period previous to the Colonel's marriage, though not before his own)—"yes, it was a great error to go out of the way to make the girl independent two years before the proper time. He had much better have tied her up till she was five-and-twenty instead."

Mrs. Winyard smiled as she answered,

"But you see, Charles, the first act of her independence was to give it back again to her cousin-guardian."

"Ah! well, we shall see what comes of it all. Far better in my opinion that both the young people had been left to form new connexions—they had both of them enough for separate families; and I never approve that in-and-in marrying."

However, General Winyard's approval or disapproval was not of much consequence;

and of course it was not expressed to the principal persons themselves, so all at Rhys Castle rejoiced in the advent of the Winyard family; and they on their part expressed much satisfaction at seeing the old Castle inhabited, after its dreary period of two years' desolation.

Besides the General and his wife, there were only two daughters living at home—the eldest and the youngest. The intermediate one had married two or three years previously. The eldest son was also married and in the army, so was seldom seen at home, and, of the two younger sons, one was studying at Oxford for the Church, and the other was a six-form boy at Harrow. Of the two Miss Winyards, the eldest was by far the most remarkable, though she was seven-and-twenty, and her sister ten years her junior.

Madeline (the eldest) had been, and was, still remarkably handsome; whilst Kate,

with all the advantages of youth, and a certain degree of prettiness, could bear no comparison with her elder sister. Miss Winyard was a remarkably beautiful woman. Tall, finely formed in face and figure, with an opaque white complexion, rarely enlivened by any colour, and abundance of dark chestnut-coloured hair, she could never pass unobserved. But admiration of any kind was the last thing apparently that Miss Winyard sought. Handsome as she was, she never tolerated any of the attention that is naturally paid to women like herself—and the effect of her coldness was such that every would-be admirer speedily vanished into distance, and finally disappeared. It was only within the last two or three years that Madeline had entered in any way into general, though never gay, society. About seven years before the time we speak of she had undergone deep and lasting sorrow in losing her betrothed lover, who was killed

in the Crimea. The intended marriage had every worldly recommendation, besides the devoted attachment of the young couple. From the time she heard the tidings of her lover's death, she was an altered being.

It was then that the deadly paleness settled on her beautiful features, and she became more like a marble statue than a living woman. Her grief was too intense and absorbing to be reasoned with, or treated like any common sorrow.

Madeline shut herself up, and at first gave way to utter despair; after a time, when the first anguish was in some degree abated, she occupied herself in her own peculiar way. She asked leave to appropriate a Summer-house, where she and her lover had often sat together in happy days (and had spent the last evening they were together), to be given up entirely to her, to be used by herself alone. There she brought all the various gifts he had ever made her

—the books they had read together, all the letters he had ever written to her. She begged from his family a few personal mementoes that she had seen him wear; and then, when her treasury was complete, she laid them on a fanciful sort of altar or shrine, and spent the greater part of her days there, in what she considered communion with himself, offering prayers with and for the dead.

Her family were obliged to humour her fancies, for fears were for some time entertained both for her life and her reason. At last, by degrees, she came more round to the ways of the outer world, and had, for the last two years, mixed with her family in their ordinary way of life, though never entering into gay society. They had been living for the last year abroad, and the constant change of scene and climate had nearly restored Madeline to the level of ordinary mortals.

But there was still, in all she said, thought

and did, a sort of yearning after the unseen —a longing to dedicate herself more especially to religious services of a peculiar character. If she had belonged to a Roman Catholic family, she would have found her peace and comfort in going into a convent. As it was, she was content to exercise her imagination in devising such occupations and pursuits as she seemed to think would be most salutary to her own soul, and that of her departed lover. Some friends had once remarked they wondered Miss Winyard did not, in her frame of mind, enter a sisterhood. But Madeline gravely protested against the suggestion, telling her friend that the monotonous round of formal duties and observances would soon either kill her body or stultify her mind.

It seemed to her a religious treadmill for the soul, where each person was expected to perform the same round of duties, without any regard to fitness, or individual tastes

and opinion—a dreary sort of peopled solitude, in which every living soul was required to be the facsimile of another.

"But," urged her friend, "the round of charitable offices in which the sisters are so constantly engaged is surely a desirable occupation."

"And what would prevent my carrying on all that at home? No, it is not under such formal bondage I should desire to place myself."

"Have you any idea, Madeline, what you *do* desire, and what would satisfy the cravings of your heart? I mean, as to outward circumstances?"

"Yes," replied Madeline, her beautiful eyes dilating and her whole form expanding. "I know exactly what I should like. I should wish to be rich—to be mistress of a charming place, where I could found a refuge for the weary and disappointed; where there would be no coercion, but all would follow the

bent of their own inclinations, subject only to certain rules and regulations of the house, which it would be my task and pleasure to guide for the benefit of all. But, alas! I am poor. I have no rich friends, and my designs must remain as they are now, the chimera of my own brain. I fear I shall never be able to afford them a more substantial habitation."

All Madeline's family were most indulgent to her fancies and out-of-the way practices. In fact, they all spoilt her, for, after the critical time of her overwhelming sorrow had passed, they still continued to look upon and treat her as a peculiar being, and one whose slightest caprices ought to be reverently attended to and humoured. It is true that the travelling plan had originated with others, who were desirous of seeing her restored to a more natural frame of mind; but it was only persevered in because Madeline willingly acquiesced in it, and declared her-

self well satisfied to have an opportunity of observing the different religious orders and practices of various countries and peoples, of gaining a more intimate insight into the origin of all the strange legends and superstitions which were to be found amongst them.

It may further be related of Miss Winyard that she was a very charming person in her own family, and with the few she might favour with her special notice and liking. Cold and repulsive as she often proved herself to be to men whose only fault was a tendency to admire the beautiful recluse too demonstratively, she was gentle and gracious enough to those from whom she had no such cause of apprehension. In her own family she was looked upon almost as a canonized saint; her father and mother adored her, and brothers and sisters idolized her also. They one and all appreciated the depth of the sorrow she had

experienced. Whilst the elders made all allowances for the extravagance of her grief, and the strange manifestations of it, the younger ones looked with a mixture of awe and admiration upon the enduring force of their sister's attachment to the lost hero, who had been dearly loved and lamented by them all. Thus Madeline, by the strength of her weakness, governed all at home, and was fully prepared to do the same elsewhere, should opportunity offer.

The families of Winyard and Powys had long been intimate, and Gwendoline's father and mother had always looked upon the General and his wife as particular friends, as well as near neighbours.

The younger branches of the two families were but little known to each other, owing to their dissimilar ages, and the fact of Madeline's early disappointment, which had withdrawn her entirely from society. Maude Beaumont's chief acquaintance had been

with the married daughter, but she was now absent, and Kate was only just making her appearance in the world. Mrs. Winyard lost no time in claiming the friendship of Gwendoline, who was but too happy to be on intimate terms with her mother's friend, but expected to find her chief interest in the companionship of the young daughter, who was nearest her own age.

However, that was not to be. Kate Winyard was a nice, lady-like girl, and they talked pleasantly enough together when they met; but Gwendoline found no special attraction in her society, or any longing to engross the most of it to her own share. She was quite as well satisfied—indeed, much better pleased—when Maude and Kate wandered away together, and left her to cultivate a more intimate acquaintance with the beautiful, and, to her thinking, far more bewitching, elder sister.

"Bewitching" was a very suitable term

for the sensation with which she regarded Madeline, for there soon came to be a sort of "witchery" in the strange influence Miss Winyard acquired over Gwendoline Powys.

Louis Beaumont was at that time absent; for soon after his fate was determined in regard to his cousin, he seemed to think he ought no longer to make her house his home; and it was settled that Gwendoline should not return to Harewood Park until the time that he took her there as his wife.

Mr. Beaumont forbore urging his cousin to an immediate marriage; he seemed to think she ought to become more familiar with her own place and people, and that she could do so best whilst she was still Miss Powys, and her own mistress, and not responsible either to guardian or husband. So Louis left his *fiancée* to pursue her own way, and make her own plans, unfettered and free.

"By the end of the Summer, or early in

the Autumn," he said to her, in one of their parting interviews, "you will be able to tell me, Gwen, when I may take you to your other home; and in the meantime, it may interest and amuse you to have the entire management of your own place and property."

Gwendoline shook her pretty head, and whispered she had much rather defer everything she wished to do "till *after*," referring to the event of her contemplated marriage.

"Don't do that, Gwen. Let me feel, when I *do* come here, that the new arrangements, which I know you desired to make, are entirely your own. Believe me, I shall have much more pleasure in seeing to their ultimate success than if they originated under my own superintendence."

"Oh! Louis, but if I should do anything foolish, or make extravagant plans!"

"Well, I can only recommend you to consult Mr. Lloyd in the latter case, and

in the first I should think your own good sense will be sufficient protection."

"And so you are determined to leave me alone for a time, Louis?"

"Not for very long, dear. Depend upon it I shall often run down for a day or two and see you; but I don't want you to consult me on these occasions. Meanwhile I shall have some difficulty in getting Maude away whilst you are here."

When Mr. Beaumont made that little speech, he quite forgot that his sister might have some little plans of her own which might tend to her brother's home as naturally as to her cousin's; he would only have said he thought the girls would like to be together. For himself he was meditating a short sojourn in London, with such occasional visits to his own place as might be pleasant or needful.

It was in one of those short excursions that the meeting with Ruth Maxwell unexpectedly took place.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Ruth turned hastily away, after her few parting words, she walked in the direction of her own house. But when she reached the gate she stopped before it. She felt too agitated to enter, so she walked for some time up and down in the sweet calm of that Spring evening, till she gradually mastered her emotion, and had regained in some degree her usual self-possession. It was the first time Ruth had ever heard her father's name treated with disrespect, or that such an idea had ever been suggested that a union with him could be looked upon as a "misfortune" by any family, however high might be their pretensions. She knew it could not really be so; but that there were

people who could think and say so, was a bitter revelation to her in every way. Her step-mother's late disclosure had in some measure prepared her for the blow, but that it should come from the hand of Louis Beaumont himself was not the least trying part of the unhappy circumstance.

There had been a sort of lurking hope in her mind that Mrs. Maxwell's story of her wrongs might have been in some degree exaggerated; that her own morbid sensibility might have caused misapprehensions which in time could have been cleared away. Still, she had considered that there might have been objections raised by her first husband's family to her second marriage; but Mr. Beaumont's speaking of it to her as "a misfortune," and she knowing how devoted her father had been as a husband, and how perfect their married life had been in its trust and happiness, how could she hear the word spoken, and not hate the speaker? She

had found excuses for Louis after his mother had told her of their relationship, because he had not been aware of it before, and even for his cruel letter as a boy, which she had seen and read—that last letter, still preserved by the mother who was renounced in it. It was yellow with time, and some parts almost obliterated with the scalding, bitter tears that had fallen upon it; but the schoolboy's letter was still in the mother's sad keeping.

"Poor mother!" thought Ruth, sadly, as at last she turned to go in. "I cannot tell her that *he* knows all now—that she is quite near to him—and that he has gone his heartless way, because she married the dearest, best man in the world!"

Ruth's heart felt very sore and angry that evening, and all the night, too; but when the morning came, in all its young Spring beauty, bringing with it an atmosphere of hope and joy to all living creatures, poor Ruth began to listen to excuses which

her own heart ventured timidly to urge.

It might not have been all his own fault, that terrible estrangement, it was more likely to be attributed to the prejudices of others —proud, worldly-minded people, no doubt! —and he, childlike, had adopted their thoughts, and angry at being deprived by them of his mother, had visited the fault on her! Then Ruth found herself watching anxiously, vainly hoping some sign or token might be sent to her mother; or that he, the long lost, but dearly loved, might find his way at last to the poor mother.

All this time Ruth had no thought of herself. She seemed to forget that such a person existed. Of Louis's engagement, too, to his cousin, she never thought. It was the mother and the son that alone occupied all her heart, and all her imagination. There was not room even for one jealous feeling that she must be henceforth so little, comparatively, to her mother, should that ar-

dently-desired meeting and reconcilement take place.

Happy, so far, was it for Ruth that this one great desire seemed to swallow up all interests that concerned herself alone. So Ruth went about her usual morning avocations much in her every-day manner; and Mrs. Maxwell, absorbed in many thoughts, never noticed how Ruth started when any one opened the door, and how eagerly she scanned any note or chance paper brought into the room.

Meanwhile Mr. Beaumont himself was not in a much happier frame of mind, after Ruth turned away so abruptly and left him in the road. The manner of her disclosure had irritated and annoyed him greatly, and then arose the ungenerous thought that she must have known it all along. Was it likely that she could have lived all that time in ignorance of her step-mother's first married name? Impossible! And then coming to

live at Castleford. Why, a thousand little circumstances must have revealed the truth to her; even supposing her to have been ignorant of her step-mother's connexions before, surely from others she would have heard of it. (Mr. Beaumont forgot how frequently the people most concerned hear little or nothing of that which is in the mouth or mind of every less interested person around them.)

Then he thought of Lany Cunliffe, and as he remembered their frequent meetings at her house, and how kindly and complacently she had always seemed to regard them, he thought of that, and a meaner suspicion still arose against poor Ruth and all her family—that it had been a conspiracy from first to last; that his mother hoped to lure him back to her by the spell of Ruth's beauty; and thinking he would condone the offence of her marriage with the father when he made, or wished to make, that

father's daughter his wife. Old Lady Cunliffe, with her foolish good-nature, had been aiding and abetting their designs throughont; and it was only when his engagement to his cousin was declared and confessed to by himself, that Miss Maxwell told him, in the most defiant manner, that she was proud to say she was "the doctor's daughter!"

So Louis Beaumont was quite as angry with Ruth as she could possibly be with him—and more so, becanse in her woman's nature she soon began to make excuses for him she loved, or had loved; whilst he, man-like, knowing so much of the evil part of human nature, visited upon her and the Maxwell family a large portion of the fruits of that knowledge. His first thought was, the next morning, to put as much distance between himself and the offending parties as he could find it convenient to do. He rather encouraged all his angry feelings, for he

feared, unconsciously, the intrusion of some softer remembrances of the still unforgotten mother who had watched over his childhood, though she had deserted him in his youth; perhaps there was a lingering later recollection of the pale, faded woman, seen almost in a dream, watching over and tending him with those trembling, almost transparent hands, so busily ministering to his comfort when he was wounded at the fire; or for whom he had felt that strange, mysterious attraction, that he accounted for to himself by supposing her to be Ruth's own mother. Then there was Ruth herself, pure-minded, noble-hearted woman as he had ever found her in all his acquaintance with her—she lead him on to an attachment and engagement from any ulterior motive!

From such conflicting thoughts Mr. Beaumont turned resolutely away—nothing but movement and distance could allay the ex-

treme irritation of his mind. He felt as if he could view things more calmly at a distance; but he was pleased to consider that he had been extremely ill-used, nearly trapped into an engagement, or it might have been a marriage (before he had known the truth) with the daughter of a man whose memory, of all people on the face of the earth, he had most reason to abhor.

Thus was he tormented between his inner consciousness, which sharply rebelled against his newly-formed opinions of Ruth Maxwell; and a strange, regretful sentiment which was warring in his heart against deeply-rooted prejudices and animosities, all too long indulged in, against the mother who, he was agitated to hear, was so near, and, but for the chance of that accidental meeting, had remained unseen. Fearing he might be betrayed into some glaring inconsistency which his better "sense" (he feared his heart) might condemn, he

determined to hasten his intended departure, and leave the Park the very morning after his unfortunate meeting with Ruth.

With the obstinate determination which was characteristic of Louis Beaumont, and an inherited defect, he lost no time in carrying out this determination, and started at an early hour that very morning. So, whilst poor Ruth was vainly indulging the faint hope that a night's reflection might bring the son to his motner's longing arms, that son, in his perversity, was already many miles on his railroad journey. It was a matter of debate to Mr. Beaumont where he should betake himself. The fact was, his nature was by no means unfeeling or callous, and though he had long considered his renunciation of his mother in his youth as an act of stern justice and necessity, in consequence of the step she had taken, and had been upheld, and even applauded, by his uncle, whose indignant anger never

abated—although he considered the step he was taking the best in every way, still he was thoroughly unhinged by the whole train of circumstances. His love for Ruth, by no means extinguished, although crushed down and ignored since his own actual engagement and her supposed one, now struggled to assert its old mastery over his heart and senses, whilst he strove against the impression by endeavouring to persuade himself of the utter unworthiness of the object.

He could not, with this tumult of feelings, go at once to Gwendoline; he must distract his thoughts—he must turn them resolutely from all dangerous subjects. He tried to believe he rejoiced with all his heart that he was engaged to marry his cousin, and that the mad impulse he had entertained, on meeting Ruth, of avowing his love, and pleading for hers in return, was now rendered impossible by the knowledge of who she was, and of everything connected

with her; for, as the thought of Gwendoline had restrained him even before he was enlightened on that point, it would henceforth not only act as a shield, but as an encouragement to hope for comfort and happiness.

But, with the recollections that were then distracting him, the thought of poor Gwendoline brought no especial balm to his wounded heart. It was ever haunted by the remembrance of Ruth Maxwell, in all her calm beauty, turning disdainfully from him, as he had denounced the connexion with her father to have been the great misfortune of his life!

Sick and weary of his cogitations, and all and every person and thing connected with them, Louis Beaumont found himself that evening in London. He went to his club, and turned over such letters and cards as had been left for him. He dined there in company with a friend or two, but their discourse, which was all of current events

and the talk of the great world, fell flat, stale and unprofitable on his pre-occupied mind.

Then he dressed, and went to some brilliant ball, where he heard a repetition of the same things, and he felt disgusted with their uninteresting monotony.

"I must get away from all this dressed-up dreariness," thought he, as he stepped, weary and languid, into his cab, and drove home from the last place of gay resort, where he had sought some passing distraction. "I can never stand a month of it, and I must take a month to forget *her*, and all the annoyance which that speech of hers has brought back to my recollection, with that wretched name of hers. What an idiot I have been never to inquire or to suspect! Well, those whom the gods seek to destroy they first blind—and blind enough have I been!"

There was little thought of Gwendoline

just then in her betrothed's heart, neither was there any intentional faithlessness. Louis had the settled purpose in his mind of making her his wife in due course of time, and he was very anxious to bring his mind to a fitting frame before that time actually should arrive.

The next morning, before London proper was fully awake, Louis Beaumont had turned his back upon its (to him) dreary delights, and found himself planning a seaside tour, promising much relief, and such enjoyment as might be procurable, considering for his comfort that, as it was too early in the season for fashionable people to go to the seaside, he had a good chance of having it all to himself. His intention was not to remain above a day or two at any place, hoping thereby to escape all chance of *ennui* in his undertaking. Thus he proposed, but how he was otherwise disposed of, a note, written during the first week of

his contemplated tour, will show. It was dated from about the third sea place he had visited, and ran thus :—

"Dearest Gwen,—You will have got my letter, written at the beginning of my intended solitary expedition, which had for its object dry land, and visiting some of the places I wished to see on the coast, but we have changed all that; for I am about to transfer myself and belongings on board the yacht *Nautilus*, which has just arrived here. She is a splendid cutter, one hundred and twenty tons, and belongs to an old friend of mine, Frank Hardy. He has persuaded me to ship myself, servant, and luggage on board this afternoon, which, truth to say, I am not sorry to do, for I do not find myself quite the pleasant, agreeable person I expected, without any occasional variety to enliven the scene, so I have gladly closed with Hardy's seasonable

proposal. He has been disappointed in meeting a chum who was engaged to go with him, but failed at the last moment; so we are both glad to be relieved from the burden of our own individual contemplations. Well, dear, I have sent you this long explanation, as I know you like to be kept *au fait* of my movements, and you shall hear where a letter is likely to reach me as soon as I know myself. Our destination is the western coast of Ireland, and round by the Orkneys. It sounds pleasant, does it not? I hope you are amusing yourself, and find pleasant neighbours in the Winyards. Tell Maude she may be relieved from any apprehension of my calling upon her to preside at Harewood for the next two months. After that, dearest, we must see to our own especial arrangements there and elsewhere. Meanwhile

"Believe me your sincere and affectionate

"L. BEAUMONT."

This was not a very favourable specimen of a "love-letter," but Gwendoline was satisfied when she received it. It told her where Louis was, what he was doing, and, above all, how long he was likely to be absent. His first letter, written the day after he left London, had caused her some disappointment, for she had hoped to see him about that time. But having made up her mind not to expect much of his company during the time intervening between their engagement and marriage, she readily acquiesced in all he thought best; and having so blissful a future in prospect, Gwendoline cheerfully set herself to follow out her own plans aud projects in the interim—her first object being the welfare of those immediately dependent upon her; the next to justify Louis's confidence in leaving her thus free to act for herself and them.

Maude was far less satisfied than Gwen-

doline with Louis's letter and message. She was beginning to weary for her old home, and of course had none of Gwendoline's hopes and aspirations to cheer her up in the new work in which her cousin found all her present interest and pleasure. But Miss Beaumont could neither complain nor explain; nor did she quite understand her own feelings of disappointment at thus having her exile prolonged. She experienced some solace, however, in talking to Kate Winyard—they found several subjects of common interest; whilst Gwendoline became daily more absorbed in those occupations which formed so endearing a bond of union between herself and the visionary Madeline.

CHAPTER III.

KATE WINYARD was pleased to find she knew several people of Miss Beaumont's acquaintance, whom they had met that Winter in Rome. Amongst others she mentioned Mr. Penrose, saying,

"He was one of the nicest Englishmen there. Mamma liked him; and so did papa. He said he knew you, when he found we had been neighbours here. I think he said he lives near your brother's place in H——shire."

"Oh! yes," returned Maude, rather maliciously, "Harewood is only three miles from Castleford; and Mr. Penrose is a great brewer and banker there."

"Yes, we heard all that," said Kate. "Mr. Penrose made no secret of his occupation—he told us all about the fire at his Brewery, and how annoyed he had been to find it was the work of some of his own people. It really seemed to have taken quite hold of his imagination, and to have driven him abroad."

"I should have thought," answered Maude, "that he had stronger reasons for keeping him at home."

"Why?" asked Kate, with sudden interest. Then, as Maude hesitated in her answer, Kate continued, "Oh! some love affair, I suppose, at home—well, I am not surprised. I always fancied he never cared to talk much to any of the beauties there."

"Perhaps he received no encouragement to do so," observed Maude, saucily.

"I don't think that," said Kate, considering—"no, I am sure it was not that, for

there were two or three people, and very nice ones, I could name, who made quite a set at Mr. Penrose. You know he had the reputation of being very rich (which everybody believed when they found he was a brewer), and he was also considered very agreeable and clever, and extremely good-looking."

"Humph!" ejaculated Maude, secretly pleased, though very angry with herself for being so.

"Well, don't *you* think so, Maude? You are so clever yourself, you must be a better judge than I; but papa said so, and even Madeline; and you know she hardly ever notices anyone."

"Mr. Penrose seems to have been lucky at Rome in finding so many admirers. I do not think we consider him anything so very much out of the common," said Maude, disparagingly.

"Ah," returned Kate, "you know a

prophet has always less honour in his own country than anywhere else."

"Well, it is lucky that this delightful Mr. Penrose abstained from encouraging any of the young ladies who you say ran after him; as I believe it is pretty well known now that he is engaged to a young lady, a sort of connection, and in the same grade of society as himself in Castleford."

"Dear me, Maude! you don't mean to say Mr. Penrose is not in society in the county? He talked of knowing you, and some people who seemed well acquainted with him in England always spoke of him as one of us!" said Kate, rather puzzled.

"Oh yes, he goes out a good deal everywhere, I believe," said Maude. "I only meant, as to his birth and profession, that the young lady seems a suitable match for Mr. Penrose."

"Well, whoever the young lady may be, I am sure she need never be ashamed of her

husband, in any society she may be in," answered Kate, with a look of honest good-nature that made her appear very like her father. Maude looked approvingly upon her little friend, but her satisfaction was checked by an uncomfortable recollection. So to change the subject she said,

"Shall we go and find my cousin, and see what she and your sister are amusing themselves with?"

"Oh yes; and do take me all over the house, as you promised," pleaded Kate.

They accordingly set off on their exploring expedition; and Maude did the honours of the old place, and at last came upon the lady of the house and Miss Winyard, who were strolling up and down one of the long galleries, absorbed in their own conversation.

"We are come to see the tapestry chamber, if you please, Gwen, that was occupied by your lovely namesake," said Maude in explanation.

"Ah, and we are just going there too," said Madeline.

"What a dear old place this castle is, upstairs and down! how I envy you, Gwendoline," exclaimed Kate enthusiastically.

The four girls then turned into the room, and for a moment all were silent as its dreary and uninhabited appearance struck more or less upon their perceptions. Madeline walked slowly round, with a dreamy pre-occupied look in her beautiful eyes, but made no audible remark.

Maude was the least impressed of the party, and soon began laughing and talking, according to her wont, calling the attention of the two visitors to the funereal-looking couch, and then turning to the large heavy chair at the bed-side, exclaimed,

"And here, in this very spot—and a most suitable one—Gwen saw a ghost."

"Oh, Maude, how can you!" exclaimed Gwendoline, looking round on hearing her cousin's observation.

"Oh, Gwen, and can you deny it, my dear? Or did you dream dreams? or did you see visions! Come! I only want a satisfactory reply to my innocent queries?"

"You know, Maude, there are some questions that can never be settled in this world," answered Gwendoline, rather uneasily. Miss Winyard's eyes dilated as they glanced from the one cousin to the other; and, as Gwendoline spoke last, she walked up to her, and passing her arm caressingly round her waist, said,

"Why, Gwendoline, you never told me of this before!"

"Dear Madeline, what was there to tell? I cannot account for my strange impressions that night, but such as they were, with all their mysterious coincidences, I can never forget them; but it is not a thing to be talked about, so pray say no more."

"Not at present," returned Miss Winyard; but as soon as her sister and friend had

strolled out of the room, and the sound of their footsteps and echo of their merry voices died away and were no longer to be heard, she turned round to Gwendoline, who still stood silent and absorbed, and said, in a low thrilling whisper,

"And now, dear, tell me all and everything. You cannot imagine the deep interest I take in your story."

Gwendoline was about to disclaim, and say that she had no story to tell. When she looked up in Miss Winyard's face, and met the earnest gaze of those expectant eyes, she could no longer resist, and very soon had revealed to Madeline the strange experience of the only night ever passed in that weird apartment. Madeline never interrupted her by word or movement till all had been faithfully related, when Gwendoline, somewhat excited by her own narrative, looked np in her friend's face and said,

"What do you think of it, Madeline? Was it not very strange?"

"And this occurred the first night of your return home?"

"Yes, the very first. I never slept another night here. But do you really think it was only a dream, or an actual appearance?"

"There can be no doubt it was a spiritual appearance; that the vision you saw was that of the poor old creature whose spirit passed away the night of your return to the home of your ancestors, and who was thus permitted, in departing, to look upon you. Oh! Gwendoline, does it not strike you that such a visitation, occurring the very day of your entering upon your new position here, speaks with striking force, as to its purport, to your heart, and as a warning to your future life? Oh! Gwendoline, I could almost envy you, chosen, as I believe you to be, to fulfil a high destiny, and exercise a mission upon earth of great importance to

yourself and others. Oh! my dearest, believe me, you have not been placed in so high a position for mere purposes of self-gratification and worldly vanity."

Gwendoline trembled as she listened to her friend's energetic address; then said, very softly,

"I hope, indeed, Madeline, to be able to do some good whilst I am here; but you must remember how short the time is before all I do, or propose to do, must be subjected to the will of another."

"Ah! yes; you allude to your marriage, Gwendoline. I had almost forgotten it. We see and hear so little of Mr. Beaumont. I was in hopes that I might have looked upon your future husband before now."

"You remember him, I daresay, Madeline, long years ago?" said Gwendoline, as they walked from the mysterious chamber, which had seemed so strangely attractive to her friend, though rather oppressive in its effect upon herself.

Miss Winyard paused for a moment or two, and passed her hand across her brow as she answered,

"My memory is often treacherous as to the people I used to see in those days, so I should like to refresh my recollections before I can answer your question." Then, turning to take a farewell look, as they stood at the door of the tapestry chamber, she observed, "What a charming oratory this old room would make."

"I thought," said Gwendoline, hesitating, as they walked down the long gallery together, "that the old dilapidated building which joins the house by the vaulted passage, and has never been used for hundreds of years, is the place you thought you had better restore for the purpose?"

"For a private chapel, my dear—yes, that was what I suggested, and I trust and pray you may be enabled to carry out that determination in a manner satisfactory to

yourself, and all those who have your truest interests at heart. But in regard to the room we have just visited, it struck me you might have much peace and comfort in converting it into a sort of oratory, where all your private devotions might be performed, more reverently than in your every-day chamber. It is very well for those whose circumstances do not permit of affording themselves such a retreat, to do the best they can in the privacy of their own apartment; but it struck me, Gwendoline, that the peculiar circumstances connected with that room seem to point out a special purpose in regard to its appropriation. Who knows what visions might be granted in answer to your prayers in such a locality?"

Gwendoline shivered a little as she answered,

"I am sure my mind would never be sufficiently at ease in that dreary old room to allow of my saying my prayers properly;

and as for going there at night, all by myself! I should do nothing but listen for old Mona chanting and croning by my side, with her stony eyes and death's-head looking face. No, Madeline, pray don't urge it, for I tell you candidly I could never bear to go alone into that room; so it is best to leave it alone!"

"What! when you have really the chance of seeing a supernatural visitant, and one who, no doubt, might speak to you, if you chose to interrogate?"

"ReallyMadeline, it makes me shudder to think of it. What questions could I possibly desire to put to a ghost, supposing it gave me the opportunity of asking them?"

"Oh! what a question to ask!" replied her visionary friend, looking past Gwendoline, with that strange, far-away look that so often came over her face, when she began to dilate upon her favourite topic, and became more intense as she continued,

"Oh, Gwen, have you no one in *that* world, the unseen, the invisible, about whose interests you are far more deeply concerned than in any earthly affairs of your own? Is there no one whose early removal has made this fair world a desert, and only to be used as the stepping-stone to another? No one in that silent and mysterious far-off land, whom you long so intensely to see once more, that your very spirit, by the strength of its yearnings, seems at times as if it would burst its earthly fetters, and become free to join the departed? And if, by some strange chance, some light or some sound comes dimly from that unseen world to ours, ah, how eagerly must one strive to catch the faintest ray of that light, or echo of that sound, in the fond, faint hope that it may bring tidings of the loved and lost of your longing soul. Is all that nothing to you, Gwendoline?"

Madeline spoke low and rapidly, just

glancing down at her friend as she finished her rhapsody. Gwendoline pressed her hand with affectionate sympathy as she answered,

"No, dear Madeline, I have never felt like that at all. I suppose it is the defect of my nature not to feel things as acutely as you do. I have, as you know, lost those very dear to me, and in this very house, and not so very long ago; but they are quite taken away, I know, from me on earth, and I can see no more of them, or expect to hear of them, till I go to them; and that time I must patiently wait for, and should indeed be very sorry to receive any tidings in the way you talk of—indeed, the fright of it would quite kill me, I am sure of that."

"Ah!" said Miss Winyard, drawing a deep sigh, "you can still enjoy the world and all things in it, dearest Gwen. You have, it is true, lost parents who were very dear to you; but you have not lost *him* who

is more than all things on earth to you! Till you have done *that*, you can never, never enter into the strange yearning after the supernatural which haunts me, waking or sleeping. I have the sensation of ever striving to place myself as near as possible to the door, which I know opens upon that mysterious immensity of space in which are contained the souls of all who ever lived upon this earth. There I desire to remain, always waiting and watching, hoping sometimes it may be found ajar, so that I may get a glimpse within, or, at least, catch some passing sound from those who are entering, or now and then, at rare intervals, returning."

"Do you think they ever *do* return, Madeline?"

"On rare occasions, *yes*, and then they are sometimes permitted to bring tidings to console the mourners here. Oh! Gwendoline, if it were ever granted me to see and

hold converse with a disembodied spirit, even though it might not be *the one* I so ardently desire to see, still it would be comfort to see one who is in the same state, and who could, perhaps, bring me some word of sad remembrance, or convey the same from me!"

Gwendoline shook her head mournfully.

"That would be very sad, cold consolation, I think, Madeline!"

"But if you were separated for ever? If Mr. Beaumont were taken from you, Gwendoline, cannot you imagine, *then*, how you would long and listen for the echo of his footsteps on the boundaries of another world?—or some faint token of his existence there?"

"I cannot tell—I hardly know," said Gwendoline, in an awe-struck whisper; but still fascinated with her friend's discourse, even whilst her own imagination refused to follow its flights, and believing that it was

the heaviness of her nature alone which prevented her doing so.

Miss Powys, in fact—in spite of all her many advantages, natural and acquired—was really humble-minded and diffident of herself, her own opinions and pretensions, and very ready to defer to those she considered her superiors in various ways—especially when she regarded them with the eyes of partial affection.

She had already given in to Madeline in many respects, and was perfectly ready to do so in others, as her admiration daily grew and strengthened. On the present occasion, it reached its culminating point when Miss Winyard said, rather abruptly, after their return to the drawing-room,

"I have a request to make to you, Gwendoline, and that is, that you will allow me to sleep in that room—the tapestry one, I think you call it? You have asked me to come here next week, when there will be

a large party staying in the house at home, so perhaps you will grant my petition at that time?"

Gwendoline would have remonstrated, only she saw her friend was bent on making the ghostly experiment, so she contented herself with replying,

"Oh! certainly, Madeline; only it is such a dreary, eerie room—but, of course, if you like it, it shall be got ready for you next week."

CHAPTER IV.

IN another week's time Miss Winyard was in full possession of the "haunted" chamber—for it had already begun to acquire that distinction. Gwendoline felt very reluctant to expose her friend to the chance of a visitation from the stony-eyed old Mona, should she still be permitted to intrude upon the living occupants of that chamber. But, as Madeline seemed determined to brave all risks, Gwendoline could only beg that the adjoining dressing-room might be prepared for her maid; but to this Miss Winyard objected, fearing, no doubt, her chance of a ghostly visitant might be lessened by the proximity of an earthly companion.

So Madeline was left alone as she desired. It was some little comfort to Gwendoline's anxious heart that it was then Midsummer —the days were at their longest in bright, beautiful, glowing July. The nights, too, were so short, that there was hardly time from sunset to cockcrow for any restless ghost to take its journey to and from another world, so Gwendoline wished her friend good night at the door of her weird-looking chamber, and sought her own humbler one, cheered with the prospect of an early sunrise.

The old housekeeper, Mrs. Jones, rejoiced unfeignedly when informed of Miss Winyard's choice of an apartment, for she had been much scandalized at the bad fame which had been settling down on one she had ever regarded with respectful admiration, as chiefest among the sleeping-rooms at Rhys Castle, and as conferring a sort of glory on that ancient abode by the solemn

splendour of its tapestry hangings, and heavy damask, and carved oak furniture. It had almost broken her heart to see it destined to be shut up after Miss Powys's abdication, and shunned as the "haunted room." It therefore brought light and comfort into her soul, when the Lady Gwendoline's apartment was re-opened and selected as the favourite one of Miss Winyard. She had always admired that stately but gracious lady, and regarded her at that time with tenfold respect. There were, however, others in the household who shook their wise heads, and said they thought Miss Winyard would be quite as anxious to leave the chosen apartment as she had been to appropriate it.

The occasion of Madeline's stay at the Castle was an influx of visitors at her own home. She might of course have shut herself up and kept aloof, as she had long been in the habit of doing, but she had latterly

become reluctant to do so on every occasion, observing how greatly it pleased both her father and mother when she occasionally made her appearance amongst their friends at home, and how eagerly they watched for, and seemed delighted at, any little concession on her part.

A large party was expected at Winyard Hall. Kate was to make her first appearance in general society; and there was a succession of gay things arranged for the week. Gwendoline's decision afforded the first opening for Miss Winyard's desertion. When asked, with Maude, to go over for the week, she answered, with some hesitation, that she feared she must decline—she was much occupied in various ways, and could not well leave home; besides, she confided to Mrs. Winyard, she did not wish to go into gay society in Mr. Beaumont's absence. That plea was quite sufficient for her considerate friends—no one urged her after

that; and the first hint of a wish on the part of Miss Winyard to avoid the party also, made Gwendoline in a moment ask her to share her solitude at the Castle. So all parties were suited and satisfied in their several ways.

Maude was beginning to get a little ennuied at the length of her exile from Harewood, and rather wearied of her cousin's pursuits, without anything in the shape of variety or gaiety to recommend them. She was but too ready to accept the Winyards' invitation; and, to Kate's delight, promised to spend the whole week there, whilst her elder sister took her place as a companion to Gwendoline.

On the appointed day, Maude set off alone to pay her visit, indulging in a little speculation during her short drive to the Winyards', wondering whom she should see or might fancy amongst the people whom she knew only by name or report, little dream-

ing that a surprise was awaiting her arrival there. She had come purposely late, so she found but few of the guests in the way when she entered the drawing-room, and those were preparing to leave the room, as the dressing-bell would soon ring.

Mrs. Winyard was on the terrace, talking to a gentleman, who, like Miss Beaumont, appeared to be just arrived. As Maude stepped out of the open window to speak to Mrs. Winyard, the gentleman drew back for a minute, then joined them, saying,

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Beaumont."

"I believe I may say the same, Mr. Penrose," replied Maude, slightly colouring, and holding out her hand.

Then they both shook hands with much calmness and self-possession, and began making a few common-place remarks to each other. Mrs. Winyard looked glad to see that Maude had found an old acquaintance

in the pleasant one they had made so lately in Rome, forgetting at the time, what her daughter Kate remembered so well, that she had heard Mr. Penrose say he was a neighbour of Mr. Beaumont's in H——shire. Maude was the most surprised, and yet the least embarrassed of the two; she said,

"I had no idea you were expected here, Mr. Penrose. I thought I had heard the names of all the invited guests, but did not catch the sound of yours."

"No—mine was a very recent invitation. I met General Winyard by chance the other day in London, and he asked me to come down for a few days, which I was glad to do."

"Then you came from London?"

"Yes. I have not been at home from abroad very long."

"What do the people at Castleford do without you?"

"Do you mean the people at the Brewery

or people in general, Miss Beaumont?" asked Mr. Penrose, with a smile.

"Oh! my observation was as general as you choose to make it."

"Well, I cannot flatter myself that my absence has made much difference to any one. I find my own affairs go on very regularly even whilst I am away; and people in general seem quite able to spare me."

"You are become very humble during your travels," said Maude.

"No, only truthful." And then, seeing that the few people still loitering on the terrace were moving towards the house at the sound of the dressing-bell, Miss Beaumont followed their example, and also walked in the same direction.

Maude found a few people she knew, when the party assembled before dinner, but for the most part they were strangers to her. She went in to dinner with some gentleman she had never seen before, but

who was apparently well known to most of the party, and looked upon as a man of some note. Maude found him pleasant, and he was evidently satisfied with the lot that had fallen to him; so they talked, and improved their acquaintance in a very satisfactory manner; whilst she never cast a look on the other side, to see who occupied that place. The sound of the voice, however, was perfectly familiar to her, as she caught some snatches of the conversation going on between him and his neighbour on the further side.

At last came a little pause in her own conversation, for her new friend was addressed by a lady who seemed to have been lying in wait for the opportunity of edging in a word, and then appeared determined to make the most of her advantage.

Meanwhile Mr. Penrose went on calmly talking to his dinner-companion, apparently unaware that Miss Beaumont was sitting silent

and unoccupied beside him. That was not a situation at all suited to Maude, and as there was a lull in the perpetual handing of dishes, she had not even that little resource to engage her attention, and began to feel as if—were it possible—she was slighted, and in a disagreeable situation, with no one to speak to, and nothing to eat. Not that she wanted to do either, of course—certainly not the latter, but it was not pleasant to sit there, with everyone talking and laughing around her, and no opportunity of making a remark. At last John Penrose turned round, and said,

"You have been a long time away from home."

"From the home where you knew me; but this seems almost the same. You know we lived at Rhys during the lifetime of my uncle and aunt."

"I do not see Miss Powys here. Is not she with you?"

"Not to-day. You saw me arrive alone. You have heard, I daresay, that my cousin is engaged now; and during my brother's absence she does not care about society."

That was the opening to a good deal of pleasant, friendly chat between the two old acquaintances, and it must be confessed neither one nor the other regretted that their neighbour's attention on either side was for the most part withdrawn from themselves during the rest of the time they remained at table. It was altogether a pleasant dinner to both, and in the course of the evening they again found themselves drawn together by the same irresistible impulse.

When Maude was alone that night, she began to feel angry and vexed that she had allowed John Penrose to talk so much to her, and still more was she displeased with herself for the pleasure with which she had listened to him; thinking, half aloud—

"And all the time he is engaged to marry

that girl! He cannot really care a great deal about her, but I suppose it is a 'prudent' match, and no one doubts Mr. Penrose is a very prudent man. It is almost a pity he should be so pleasant, too!"

Maude Beaumont was right. John Penrose was a prudent man, he never did a thing hastily, or without turning it well over in his mind. So having, somehow or other, arrived at the conclusion that Miss Beaumont looked coldly on him, and that he had better (as he had often thought before) look elsewhere for a wife, he proceeded very cautiously to examine the state of his feelings in regard to Miss Maxwell, before he made any attempt to interest her on his own behalf. It was on all accounts he had thought best to absent himself for a time from home. He had been spending the Winter in Italy, and did not return home till late in the Spring to Castleford. He was

rather surprised to find the Beaumonts still absent, and yet more so to find Sir Digby Ferrers still enjoying his bachelor freedom. Had there been anything like an engagement between him and Miss Beaumont, the whole neighbourhood would have known something about so interesting an event. But it soon became clear to him that such was not the case.

Mr. Penrose met Sir Digby soon after his return home, and found he had been in town, and was returning there immediately. He mentioned having met Mr. Beaumont there, but of the sister neither of the gentlemen spoke. It was, in fact, rather a tender subject for both; for Mr. Penrose, although he had considered himself cured of his unlucky passion for Maude, during his long absence from home, and very determined to think of some one else, could not entirely divest himself of old home associations, which had returned in unpleasant force on

finding himself again in all the old familiar haunts which recalled them.

As for Sir Digby, he was a much-enduring but still hopeful man, yet so uncertain of the extent he had gone in the desired direction, that he dared not venture on the chance of writing a formal proposal to Miss Beaumont, neither, in the absence of all invitation, did he run the risk of suddenly presenting himself at Rhys Castle; for he felt, if Maude had not yet come to a decision in his favour, that might mar all his hope of future success. Louis Beaumont had told him he expected his sister and Miss Powys would be in London some time during the Summer, so Sir Digby lingered on in the hope of seeing them, and also preferred passing the time there, as it went more quickly, he found, in London than in the country. However, after a time he heard Louis Beaumont was gone yachting with Sir Francis Hardy, and then he seem-

ed to lose sight of all the Harewood Park family; nevertheless, he went his quiet way, and wisely determined to amuse himself as well as he could till they all returned, when he intended to go home also.

John Penrose, in spite of all his constitutional prudence and caution, could not bring himself into so perfectly quiescent a state. He was restless and dissatisfied with himself and everything around him at Castleford. His first impulse, on returning there soon after Easter, was to go and see Ruth Maxwell, and ascertain whether he really did care a little for her in the way he desired. There had been an occasional correspondence kept up between them during the time he had been away. He had begged her to let him hear sometimes of all the people in whom they were both interested, and all the news of Castleford. He soon found, when Ruth cheerfully complied with his request, that she confined

her subjects to those above-named, except an occasional mention of books she was reading, and allusions to subjects mentioned in his own letters. No mention was ever made of the Beaumonts; so, if Mr. Penrose had hoped to have been apprised of their movements through that channel, he must have been grievously disappointed. He hastened, however, to call on Ruth the day after his return.

After the first little flush called up by the surprise of the unexpected meeting had died away on Ruth's face, and the temporary animation of meeting had subsided, Mr. Penrose was struck with something of a change which he felt had come over Ruth since he had last seen her. There seemed to be less of vitality both of body and mind —a sort of inertness of the one, and a depression of the other, which could not be entirely overcome or concealed. It seemed as if some blow had fallen upon Ruth since

he had last seen her, which had struck very deeply into all the sources of her innocent pleasures, and made them all tasteless and unpalatable. What could it be? He had never suspected the growing attachment between her and Louis Beaumont, and therefore looked elsewhere for the cause of her dejection. He was wise enough to see she cared nothing for himself, and, for all he knew, was never likely to do otherwise. The slight test he applied in that direction failed entirely—his sudden and unexpected appearance had only startled her; his expressions of warm friendly interest were only met with such an open return, so unconcernedly spoken, that it was evident there was no *arrière pensée* in her mind or heart; no lingering feeling of peculiar, though unuttered interest. Still Ruth by no means gave way to the sentiment of deadly apathy she often felt stealing over her, threatening to destroy every source of comfort and use-

fulness. She went about as usual, and made herself acquainted with all the sorrows and wants of those she could in any way soothe or help; and she soon began talking to Mr. Penrose about some of his dependents in whom he had taken a peculiar interest; but his own interest was not as warm as it had been in that direction. His mind appeared untuned to the subject; and his visit to Ruth seemed to have only one result—that of convincing him that there never could be any warmer regard between them than had heretofore existed. And he was perfectly satisfied that it should be so. Still he felt sure some sorrow had fallen on Ruth or her step-mother since he had left the place; and he was sufficiently interested in both to feel a kind of anxiety as to what its nature or cause might be, his mind often recurring to the question, "What can their trouble be?"

CHAPTER V.

THAT question was met with an answer much sooner than he expected, for, on leaving Miss Maxwell's house, Mr. Penrose bent his steps in the direction of The Bower. There he found Lady Cunliffe, looking very bright in her Summer-tinted apparel, and wandering slowly about, looking at her gorgeous flower-beds. He was received with something approaching to rapture by the Indian widow, who extended both her plump hands to meet his, whilst she expressed her delight at his unexpected return.

"I said I hoped to be back about this time, Lady Cunliffe; and you know I am a punctual man in word and deed."

"Well, it is quite refreshing to see you back, for we are dull beyond conception here; and now I hope you are come back to settle at home."

Mr. Penrose shook his head.

"Not just yet, I think. I am going to town next week. It is as you say, dull in this part of the world."

"But, my dear sir, why then do you make it duller still by running away the instant you set foot amongst us? And now all your new buildings are getting on so famously, why, you must be so much wanted at home, amongst all your people at the fine new Brewery."

Mr. Penrose made a little face of disgust.

"I fear I am not very essential to the well-being of any one. If the people there thought they could better themselves in any way, they would soon burn down my beautiful new Brewery, as they did the old one."

"Oh! Mr. Penrose, I don't like to hear

you say so. Of course there are always bad people in the world, even amongst the brewers, but still there are a great many good ones. I am sure I have met with a good many in my time; and when you have lived as many years as I have, I hope you will be able to say the same."

"I fear that is not the general result of a long experience," returned Mr. Penrose. Then turning the subject from his own personal affairs, he said, "I have just been to see Mrs. and Miss Maxwell."

"Ah!—yes—well—how did you find them?"

"I thought Mrs. Maxwell seemed much the same—but not so your niece. She looks pale and thin, as if she had been ill, or—"

Then John Penrose paused; he did not like to say "unhappy," but Lady Cunliffe seemed to fancy he had said it, for she answered,

"Yes, I fear there has been some mis-

chief. I never fancied all that acquaintance going on with the Beaumonts and everybody—in the dark, as it were, playing at cross purposes."

"What do you mean, Lady Cunliffe?" said Mr. Penrose, suddenly pausing in his walking, and looking full in the lady's plump, good-natured face.

"Oh! you know all about it, my dear sir, as well as I; and poor Mrs. Maxwell never liking to speak out till it was too late —but I find she has done it at last. But poor Ruth has been made, as you say she looked, 'unhappy' enough, poor girl; and he—Mr. Beaumont—is going to marry his cousin, as I suppose you know?"

"Yes, I fancied that had been a settled affair for some time."

"Yes, settled *for* them, not *by* them," interrupted Lady Cunliffe, with some vivacity.

"Ah! you mean—I see; and then you

suppose there has been an attachment between Miss Maxwell and Mr. Beaumont, and this revelation has put an unfortunate end to it?"

"Well, I can't say as much as that," returned Lady Cunliffe, more slowly, "but there is a terrible hitch somewhere or other. That Mr. Beaumont liked Ruth, I would stake my existence; and—and—well, there is no shame in it, the poor girl returned it. I saw it all clearly enough, for he was always coming mooning about here to meet her, and everything he looked—and I daresay *said*—to her, told the old story. Then, after a time, the Beaumonts go away, and when I am thinking to myself he will come back soon, and propose to Ruth, we hear he is engaged to marry that cousin of his—a nice girl enough; but altogether, it is a sad thing for us, Mr. Penrose!"

"I hope Miss Maxwell may not be as deeply wounded—interested, as you sup-

pose," replied Mr. Penrose, with that indefinite feeling of dislike which men often entertain to hearing of a girl's liking for another man—especially if they have had the most distant thought of her themselves.

"Well, perhaps you will think it is foolish in me to talk of poor Ruth's troubles so freely," said the little widow, partly divining Mr. Penrose's sentiments; and, continuing, "And I would not have done so, but I look upon you almost as her own relation—a sort of guardian or brother; and I have had no one to speak to about it—and indeed I hoped in the beginning that I had been mistaken, for Ruth took it very coolly at first; but I have since seen her pining from week to week. And I know there is no hope, for though the marriage is put off, as the gentleman has given out it will not be for a month or two yet, and perhaps longer, yet we know it is all fixed sure enough, and Miss Powys is not to come back till she is Mrs. Beaumont."

"Well, as it *is* to be, it does not signify to us outsiders exactly *when* the event takes place. But did I understand you to say that the connexion between the families is now known and acknowledged?"

"I know nothing about *that*, Mr. Penrose —I only know Mrs. Maxwell has told Ruth, at last—though she never actually said so to me; but whether the Beaumonts—brother or sister—are aware of it, I cannot tell?"

"Then it was not *that* broke off the—the —whatever there might have been in the case?" said Mr. Penrose, somewhat vaguely.

"I should think certainly not, and I cannot tell you what it was, for the night of your fire (you know what I mean) they were as friendly as could be—down there together after they had been up here together, Ruth and Mr. Beaumont, and everybody that saw them thinking it must end in a match! No!—I suppose when the

gentleman got down there in that wild Welsh place, he had nothing to do but make love to his cousin; and certain it is that the engagement took place there—and I suppose the marriage will also. But, if poor Ruth had known what she was about, and very likely if he had done the same, they would both have got out of each other's way, and so no harm would have been done."

"But, thinking so, Lady Cunliffe, why did not *you* take upon yourself to enlighten both parties?"

"Partly because I did not like to put my finger into Mrs. Maxwell's pie, and partly because I was an old idiot, and Sophy has as good as told me so."

"By-the-bye, where is Miss Wheeler?—she is not out with you as usual."

"No, I am sorry to say she is indoors as usual. Ah, Mr. Penrose, poor Sophy is in a sad way—gets worse and worse!"

Here the good lady shook her head, and looked unfeignedly sorrowful.

"Ah! I remember Miss Maxwell mentioned her as an invalid; but I did not think much of it. I hope she will get better soon. It must be sad for you."

"Yes, sadder than you can think or have any idea of; for there is that poor girl—woman I ought to call her—going as fast as she can out of this world, and knows no more than a baby about the one she is going to."

"But surely she would listen to you, Lady Cunliffe." That lady shook her head decidedly. "Or get your clergyman to talk to her."

"I did try that one day," replied Lady Cunliffe, sorrowfully, but she turned all he said into ridicule, and quoted dreadful French books, to prove there is no hereafter, or, at least, anything like what we have faith in; but said if she was good she would float

about upon a cloud, which she had no particular fancy for, or if bad, she should be turned into some beast, which she liked less; so she preferred to think there was an end of everything at the death of the body."

"She can't *really think* that, Lady Cunliffe."

"I don't know; Sophy is very peculiar and rather perverse; and now I feel quite sure that she would be worse with a clergyman than anyone else now. Mr. Penrose, I really do think if you went in and seemed to take a little interest in her, she would be likely to listen to you, if you would talk a little seriously to her; and I have heard that you have often gone and read to some of your own people when they have been sick and dying."

Mr. Penrose flushed a little when the good lady, in her enthusiasm, said this; but he only answered,

"I fear I have not been very successful

in any endeavours I have made to enlighten my own people, and I feel no inclination to trespass on the province of the clergyman in Miss Wheeler's unhappy case; but I shall be very glad to go in and see how she is this fine afternoon. It must do her good."

"Well, go in at that door; you will find her in the drawing-room."

Mr. Penrose did as he was desired, and found poor Sophy in her usual place, looking much like a living skeleton, with her large dark unearthly bright eyes glowing in their deep sockets shewing the extreme pallor of the wasted face more ghastly by contrast. She held out her thin bony hand, and glanced up eagerly for a moment into the young man's face, to read there what was the impression she produced, and then she said,

"I see you think me as bad as bad can be, but I am really a little better lately. What a long time you have been walking and talking to Lady Cunliffe! You see she

has quite learnt to go about without a walking-stick since I have been laid by."

"Yes, Lady Cunliffe seems active enough now, and to have nothing to complain of."

"In that way—the way of health? No, certainly not. I think her chief subject of grievance is Miss Maxwell, and her disappointment about Harewood Park."

"I do not think she ever mentioned the place."

"Well, then, I am sure she talked about the master of the place."

And then Miss Wheeler had a fit of coughing, and leant back exhausted for a few minutes. At last, recovering, she said,

"Pray do not let me frighten you away, Mr. Penrose. It is such a treat to see a new face, and a cheerful one; and to talk about something except one's miserable feelings and ailments. I am heartily sick of my own, I know."

"I can easily believe that," said Mr. Penrose, with ready sympathy.

"Yes, but it must come sooner or later to us all, and in a hundred years we shall both be gone; and if there is any hereafter, I daresay you will tell me I was the luckiest in having the shortest time of it here."

"Yes," said Mr Penrose, musing,

"'The less of earth, the more of heaven!'"

"Oh! don't!—don't begin to preach! I did not mean *that.* You know I was only thinking what an unpleasant world this is; and so I am glad I shall have so little of it."

Mr. Penrose was rather tempted to say, "You have had a good share of it already," but he only observed,

"I am sorry, indeed, that you should suffer from such uncomfortable thoughts; but suppose you try to make the best of the world you do know something of—it might help you a little."

"What, now, at the eleventh hour? No, you don't think I could begin to be happy now, Mr. Penrose, if I had the best material

to work upon, instead of nothing but a retrospect of suffering and sorrow."

"That is hard, indeed," said the young man, compassionately. Sophy looked up and saw the concern was genuine, so she dropped her mocking tone, and said, more softly,

"Ah! you can hardly tell, you who stand there in the full vigour of life, and health, and enjoyment of all the good things in this world, you can form no idea of the misery that I am doomed to suffer."

And she looked at him with envious, half imploring eyes, out of which a soul could be discerned dimly struggling with its fate, and looking eagerly for help and pity.

"You need not envy me so much," he said, in reply to her look. "Depend upon it we have all something to vex and worry, either little or large. I have my troubles, if that is any comfort to you."

"And what are they, compared with mine?"

asked the dying woman, fixing another appealing gaze upon him.

"Well, small enough, I daresay; and there are some who would perhaps think yours small compared with theirs."

Miss Wheeler laughed a faint, hollow laugh, that sounded anything but mirthful, as she replied,

"I should like to see that strange person."

"Come, you must not give way to such feelings. I tell you, as your friend, they are morbid, and more the result of ill-health than any real substantial misery. You say you feel rather better than you did, so why do not you try and get out a little, and vary the scene? If you will let me, I will send you a garden-chair to be wheeled about in, and you may get gradually stronger, but you are moped to death sitting here; and this is not a nice companion for you in your present mood."

This remark was applied to a well-known

German work that lay on the table, imbued with the worst principles of rationalism and infidelity that could be advocated.

"It is a clever book, and I like it," said Sophy, decidedly.

"But really it is not good for you. I do not like to see it on your table."

"But I do not care for good books," said Sophy, pleased, in spite of herself, with the appearance of interest shown in her feelings and her occupations.

"But you need not read bad ones."

"*C'est selon.* What one person thinks good another condemns."

"But there can be no doubt about this. Let me take it away, Miss Wheeler. I mean, place it at a safe distance. I could send you, I am sure, something to read better than that, and both clever and amusing. Come, that is a bargain. Now give up that book to me."

"Never!" exclaimed Sophy, suddenly

flushing crimson. "That book was given to me by the only person I ever really loved in this world, and I would sooner part with my life!"

"I fear the principles contained in it are only likely to embitter your life now, and, if you believe in a future, that also."

"Well, thank you for caring ever so little what becomes of me hereafter. It is more than *he* did, though I can never forget what we once were to each other; so sometimes I try and forget the rest."

"I wish I could do anything to help you," said John Penrose, kindly, touched with compassion at the poor woman's avowal, which he saw was the key to all her sorrows.

"Well, you can send me your *amusing* books, if you really are so kind, but pray let them be *amusing*. I cannot understand your frightful good books; they make my flesh creep with horror, for I know I am

not, and never have been, *good*, so there is not much hope of my becoming a saint now, and I know anyone who falls short of that is condemned to such horrors as only the very pious people can imagine. No, don't give me any of those tales to read. My own despised books are far more comforting than that, for I have not the least objection to fall asleep and never awake again, let it be as soon as you please."

"But if that cannot be?"

"Well, then, let me remain in ignorance, if I know no better; for surely I cannot be condemned for my want of knowledge? I only know it was quite contrary to my wishes that I ever came into the world at all."

Mr. Penrose had carried on this talk with poor Sophy, seeing it afforded some relief to her evidently burdened mind. He was not in the habit of discussing such subjects, and had an unfeigned horror of cant; but

he was a man of firm, religious principle himself, well borne out in general by practice. He had a very reverent regard for all that was right and good in others, and though falling very short in his own estimation of the high standard he really admired, he was yet a very fair specimen of what that standard might be.

No doubt he was greatly indebted to the somewhat strict manner in which he had been brought up in his uncle's house; and though his own discernment led him to avoid all that was narrow-minded in his own profession, he always acted up to that profession in a straightforward, manly way. He had met before with cases resembling poor Sophy Wheeler's, and he said to himself: "Poor soul! in her inmost heart she believes, but her belief only makes her tremble, so she tries to get away from her persuasions, and take refuge, such as it is, with the 'father of lies.' I can do but

little for her myself, except try and persuade her to listen to others, who might help her more effectually."

So John Penrose put off his intended journey to London for a short time, and became, in the meantime, a constant and very welcome visitor at Lady Cunliffe's house.

CHAPTER VI

THIS concession was very amiable in Mr. Penrose, for he was longing to get away to London, as he looked forward to meeting the Beaumonts there. His absence from home had taught him in what direction his feelings really tended, and finding that Maude was still, as he hoped and believed, unappropriated, he could not resist listening to some pleasant suggestions within, that were ever ready to make themselves heard and attended to. He often debated the point in himself, whether he should at that crisis give up all his large, profitable Brewery concern in Castleford, and having sold it, as he knew it would not be difficult to do,

purchase the estate of Waterfalls, and then present himself to Miss Beaumont as a man of independent means—less wealthy, certainly, than if he continued in his occupation, but, at all events, relieved from the stigma of trade. In that state of uncertainty he rather cherished his unpleasant feelings on all subjects connected with the Brewery business, and allowed the ill-conduct of those who had injured him to weigh more heavily than was just or fair against the claims of others, who were faithful and good servants.

It was Ruth Maxwell who soon detected this state of feeling in her friend, and though quite unconscious of all the under influence at work, ventured to remonstrate with John Penrose upon it. His answer surprised her.

"I have thoughts of disposing of the whole concern; ever since the fire I have felt a certain distrust and disgust to the whole business. I verily believe the men's families

think me to blame in that they were convicted and condemned for their crime."

"I don't think that," said Ruth gently; "I think all of them are quite satisfied that there was no other course for you to pursue."

"I owe you thanks for that; it was you who made them understand, and tried to set me right with them."

"There was no great difficulty in that, for they were all—all the families I mean of those unhappy men—indebted to your generous kindness for their support and maintenance; but I do hope you are not about to relinquish the old concern, which they say is likely to become more flourishing than ever, with all these great improvements in the new buildings."

John Penrose smiled as he answered,

"I can do nothing in that way without your permission and approbation. Your property is all settled in the Brewery, and

you must allow me to secure it elsewhere before I can dispose of the concern."

"I should willingly defer all that to your judgment; but I do hope you will not do as you say."

"Do you think making money is such a desirable pursuit?—for I have already as much as I desire."

"No, I was not thinking of that, only of your people concerned in the business, and how many might be thrown out of employment; or, at all events, be turned over to others who might care less for their best interests in every way than you have done. Oh, Mr. Penrose, I think it is a great responsibility that men like you hold in their hands; and if you are bent, as you have always been till now, on discharging them conscientiously, surely you hold a great stake in the affairs of the world, and secure the happiness and welfare of so many. I do hope you will stay by your own people, and

forgive the faults of those who went wrong. I am quite sure of this, from all I see and hear, that there is generally the strongest personal attachment to yourself, as well as hereditary regard and respect for your family."

Mr. Penrose looked for a moment in Ruth's sweet earnest face, all glowing with anxiety for the good of others, and forgetting all her own sorrow and care in so doing; and again the thought intruded itself into his mind that Ruth Maxwell would have been much better suited to him as a wife than Maude Beaumont.

"Yes," returned his inner consciousness, "if she had cared for you, and you had not loved the other."

After a short time Mr. Penrose managed to associate Ruth Maxwell with himself in his visits to poor Sophy Wheeler. It was a difficult task at first, but succeeded after a while, even beyond his own expectations.

Sophy's jealous, envious spirit was at rest, in regard to Ruth. She was evidently by no means happy; both her love and her deep reverent affection for her father's memory had been sorely wounded. She was besides anxious and uneasy about her step-mother, whose thoughts seemed all absorbed in the idea of a re-union with her children; and now that the ice was broken in regard to them, talked—when she did talk—of nothing else, and was becoming perfectly indifferent to every other worldly interest or person.

Thus Ruth became far more acceptable as a friend and companion to the sick woman at The Bower, and by degrees almost more essential to Sophy's comfort than to her step-mother's. So Ruth's days were spent between the two, and in frequent visits amongst her poorer friends and acquaintances. Then it was that John Penrose left home again on his London visit. He pro-

mised Ruth he would do nothing rashly in regard to throwing up the old family concern; and that if he did so, he would take the greatest care to secure the permanent interest of all the hands employed in it.

"But," he added, with some degree of embarrassment, "there might arise circumstances which would render it advisable for me to do so, but in that case the wishes of another must be consulted."

With ready perception, Ruth detected a latent meaning in Mr. Penrose's remark, and though not guessing the exact object of it, was satisfied to drop the matter.

It was during his stay in London that John Penrose accidentally met General Winyard, and then and there received the invitation which brought him into Wales. The meeting so soon with Miss Beaumont was a surprise to himself as well as to her. He knew she was staying with Miss Powys somewhere in that locality, but how near

had been a subject of deep speculation to him. Since accepting this invitation, no doubt he had indulged in a decided hope that he should not only hear of her from the Winyards, but also have a chance of seeing her; but the when and the where was all enveloped in a mist of uncertainty, till the very day of his arrival there so happily settled the question.

That Maude felt happier than she had done for some time, there is little question; and after a day or two passed in the same house, began seriously to question within herself whether she might not have made some mistake in regard to his supposed engagement to Ruth Maxwell. She saw him at Winyard under the most favourable circumstances—he was evidently as much esteemed there as she could be herself. She was no longer the observed of all observers, as was the case at Harewood Park, when she seemed, as the lady of the house, so far

above John Penrose, well known as the Brewer of Castleford.

At Winyard they both stood upon their individual and personal merits, though Mr. Penrose had certainly the advantage of being acknowledged as a man of large fortune, and was also considered a particularly agreeable, good-looking, and gentlemanlike man. Maude no doubt was handsome enough, and pleasant withal, but she was not altogether the same important personage that she was considered in her own neighbourhood. Her reign too in her brother's house was at an end—in a very little time he would take his wife there, and then Miss Beaumont was aware she must sink into the second place at Harewood Park.

However, it may be said, to Maude's credit, that she had ardently desired to see her cousin mistress there, and no selfish consideration had ever operated for a moment in inducing her to wish otherwise

after they became engaged. Still it cannot be denied that Maude's sentiments in respect to Sir Digby Ferrers had received a quickening impulse as she thought of her new position at home; and she began to question with herself whether she might not eventually be brought to reward his much-enduring attachment; for that it had remained the same she never doubted, and had begun of late to calculate on the chances of an early meeting. It had been settled that she and Gwendoline were to go up to town prior to the marriage, for the purchase of some few things that Gwendoline wished to choose herself. All that related to the actual trousseau had been arranged without the trouble of a journey before that time. Their own milliner had, in her own important person, been down to Rhys Castle, and there received all orders necessary for the occasion. But Gwendoline had wished to take her mother's jewels with her to Lon-

don, for such alterations as might be required; and Louis Beaumont waited that opportunity of making his intended purchases in that way for his young bride. It was singular perhaps that neither he nor Maude could ever prevail on themselves to open the large case which contained all the family jewelry, which their mother had left at the Park when setting out on that journey to London which resulted in her marriage with Dr. Maxwell, and from which she never returned to her children there. Louis had been very liberal in his gifts to his sister, but by tacit consent there was never any mention made of those jewels which had once belonged to their mother, and had been detained by Colonel Beaumont, considering they were part of the family property, and ought as such to be reserved for her children.

So Mr. Beaumont, on the approaching occasion, was prepared to make such pur-

chases as his bride might fancy; though she, on her part, possessed so many valuable things that had belonged to her mother that it seemed to Gwendoline rather superfluous, receiving anything more from her future husband. There were, however, several other purchases Gwendoline desired to make, and she and Maude were only waiting Louis's return from his yachting expedition to join him there, rather expecting, however, to see him first at the Castle.

The time went on; the Summer flew quickly, and Louis's letters still announced him in the north of Scotland, when Maude went to pay her first visit at Winyards Hall, and Gwendoline had the satisfaction of entertaining her friend Madeline at the Castle. The first few nights in the reputed haunted chamber passed quietly away. Madeline appeared well satisfied with her weird chamber, and Gwendoline regarded her with increasing wonder and admiration.

She had, in fact, never been so happy before in her life. Her new friend stirred her up to a course of enthusiastic occupation and activity. Madeline became the moving spirit of all Gwendoline's plans and projects. Sometimes she would venture the question—"But do you think Louis would like all this?" Miss Winyard's quiet response, "I should hope there can be no doubt of that, especially as he begged you (you tell me), and I see from the letters you have shown me, to exercise your own taste and judgment in all you do in your *own place.*"

Madeline dwelt much upon this unlimited confidence placed in her friend by her betrothed, and took advantage of it to induce Gwendoline to realise many of her own visionary dreams. One great object was the restoration of the old chapel, and converting it again into a place of daily worship.

"But," said Gwendoline, "I am not sure

whether Louis would like to read prayers here every morning and evening; he has always had them in the hall at the Park. Perhaps I had better wait, as it will be such an expense, till he comes back."

"As you like, my dear; but has it never struck you that you have great powers at this time entrusted to you? and if you are fearful of using them for the good of others, can you be accounted worthy of the trust?"

"I daresay I am very unworthy, as you say, Madeline; only I feel half perplexed at doing so many things without consulting Louis; but I really do wish to do right, and it is a great blessing for me to have you with me to tell me how."

"Well, then," returned Miss Winyard, neither accepting nor rejecting the compliment, "next week we will set to work on the chapel, and this afternoon we will devote to looking over such books in the old library as may help us to do it in the right

way. Only let your *will* be steadfastly inclined in one direction, Gwendoline, and half the work is already accomplished."

"I have been thinking," said Gwendoline the next day to her friend, "that if we are to have a chapel, and regular services, as you have pointed out to me, Madeline, we ought to have a regular chaplain."

"No doubt about that," said Miss Winyard, decidedly. "I have already turned that point over in my mind."

"Indeed!" said Gwendoline, looking anxiously at her friend—"do you mean that you have thought of anyone in particular? I have been wondering whether Mr. Morgan would object to coming here every morning and evening, and even in the evenings *now;* but in the bad Winter nights to turn out at ten o'clock would be rather hard on him and Mrs. Morgan, wouldn't it, Madeline?"

"I can see no great hardship in it, though,

doubtless, a fat, well-to-do English clergyman might consider it such."

"Oh! Madeline, I am sure Mr. Morgan is not fat!" put in Gwendoline, deprecatingly; to which her friend made answer—

"I am not speaking of bodily fat, Gwendoline—only of that sort of easy living which renders some clergymen indisposed to any extra exertion; but I have, I hope, a remedy at hand, and a priest of my own bringing up, as it were, and one who will very shortly be enabled to take the charge upon himself—that is, if you approve, and think Mr. Beaumont will do so also."

"Oh! Madeline, how good of you! Do tell me who it is that you think will not object to undertake all we have been talking about—that is, acting as domestic chaplain, seeing to the new schools, and village hospital, and the new almshouse—or, as you call it, refuge for the weary and sorrowful. Oh! there will be a great deal to

be done; and whom have you thought of as likely to undertake such endless work?"

"One whose only desire is to work for ever here, that he may rest for ever hereafter; it is my dear brother Cyprian, who agrees with me in everything I think or do. We have always been bound together by the tenderest ties of affection, and to see him blest in every way is my almost only earthly care now. I have told you of him before, but it is only lately that I have thought in any way of associating him in our intended proceedings. He leaves Oxford this term, and will be ordained shortly after. In the meantime, there can be no objection to his officiating in the way you require here."

"What do you mean him to do, Madeline?—and when are we to begin the services?"

"Well, I should like to see everything well organized and put in train before your

marriage takes you away from us. My idea is that Cyprian, who will of course live at home, can come over every day, and visit the new schools and cottages, and everything you may like to put under his charge; and then, when he is properly ordained, it will be time for him to officiate in the new chapel. In the meantime, he can come over at any time you like and read prayers to you and your household of a morning."

"Oh! Madeline, I should not like to ask Mr. Winyard to do that—to give him all that trouble, and not even an acquaintance as yet; though I am sure," added Gwen, apologetically, "I shall like him very much for your sake."

"And his own also, or I am very much mistaken, Gwendoline. But it strikes me, in what you observed just now, that you are thinking of my brother as a man—I mean such as you meet in ordinary society,

and not in his vocation as a priest. Remember he can never labour too hard in that calling, and if you give him the opportunity of beginning here, he as well as I shall be everlastingly obliged to you."

"Oh, Madeline, how glad I am to do anything you like! But just tell me about your brother. Is he at all like you in person as well as mind, or like any of the rest of your family I have seen?"

"He is strikingly like me, Gwendoline. You know I was once considered very handsome, and he is the image of what I was in my best days. I can fancy Cyprian's the beauty of an archangel, it is so majestic and so pure. I am sure you will soon understand each other."

"I hope so," was all Gwendoline's reply; but she rather wondered whether Louis would also understand and like it all.

CHAPTER VII.

"WHAT is the matter, father? You look in a brown study," said Miss Lloyd to her father, a few days after the above conversation.

The agent looked up from his employment, which was at a table thickly strewn with books and papers, and only nodded in reply to his daughter's interrogation. Margaret took the hint and turned to her unfailing resource, the work-basket, and proceeded to occupy herself industriously with some of its contents.

An hour passed away, the silence only interrupted by the scratching of the agent's pen or the rustle of his daughter's work as

she turned it about in the required direction. They were seated in a cosy parlour with a large bay lattice window looking into a garden that was half devoted to useful purposes, and the rest to ornament. Margaret was very proud of her garden, and it was neat as it was pretty. It was getting late in the evening, the tea-things had been taken away some time, and Miss Lloyd was beginning to think it was getting dark enough for candles, and was rising to order them, when her father put out a detaining hand.

"Not yet, Marg'et. I must rest my head and hand for a short time. And now it is too dark to work any longer, I am ready to talk—that is, to answer your question. Yes, my dear, when you observed me so deep in my calculations,. you might well call it a brown study. Whatever is come over all the family here I can't imagine."

"Anything new, father?"

"There is something new every day, I think—some fresh vagary or other. I think the young lady had better begin at once to build a jail or a lunatic asylum, for I think she will end her days in one or the other, if she goes on much longer in the way she has begun?"

"Dear me, father, you astonish me! Why, I thought you said Miss Powys seemed so judicious, and so kind, and so bent upon doing everything that is good, and now everything seems wrong."

"I don't say that, Marg'et, and I am wrong to be so touchy; but that poor child has no more idea than the man in the moon of what she is about, and gives all sorts of orders for all sorts of extravagant things, and I am to make an estimate of the cost."

"But what is Mr. Beaumont about, father?"

"I can't tell. Amusing himself sailing about no one knows where, having desired

the young lady to act for herself in the meantime, as she is of age (a pretty age it is, nineteen), and says she ought to be accustomed to the use of money, and to manage her own property!"

"But, surely, father, if she is going to do anything imprudent, you are the person to tell her of it. Why, I know she looks to you for advice. I have heard her say so, in her pretty way."

"Yes; and once upon a time she was ready enough to listen, and take advice, but now she is entirely guided by that crack-brained Miss Winyard, who is wild about erecting all sorts of impossible refuges, and houses, and chapels, and hospitals; and then she gives her orders, and Miss Powys attends to them as if it was Miss Winyard's own property, to do as she likes with it."

"That is unlucky, indeed, father; but surely you can do something. I thought the

plan for the village hospital was a very good and reasonable one."

"Granted, my dear; and if Miss Powys had been contented, as she seemed some time ago, to be satisfied with that, and the addition to the schools, and some cottage improvements, it would have done very well, and we should all have had reason to thank her; but now it is quite monstrous, talking of restoring the old chapel, when there is as good a church, all lately restored and beautified by her good father and mother; and so what she can want with a private chapel besides, and to be restored at an enormous expense, is inconceivable to me, or anyone of common sense."

"I suppose that is Miss Winyard too, father? But my advice is to delay the work, throw every impediment in the way, till Mr. Beaumont comes back, and then he will take things into his own hands."

"I wish he may; but your advice is good, my dear. We can but delay. I am only afraid of her insisting on having contracts for the work drawn up and undertaken before Mr. Beaumont comes home; and there is that stately-looking lady always at her elbow, urging her on, and getting drawings and copies made, and such a host of designs, and plans, and projects that my poor head is fairly muddled; and then she obligingly offers to do my work for me, if it puzzles me!"

"You don't mean that, father? Surely Miss Winyard is a lady, and would not forget so far what is due to you."

"She means no harm, my dear, only just what she says. She thinks she knows—as she probably may do—a great deal more about church architecture than I do, so she volunteers to write to different people herself instead of me."

"That will never do, father," said the

daughter, musing, and wondering what had come over the charming young lady she admired with all her heart, to make her so unreasonable and headstrong, and wondering why the betrothed husband did not hasten back to take charge of his lovely betrothed bride.

It was, indeed, somewhat strange this long absence of Louis Beaumont; but it was not altogether his own fault—he had cast in his lot with his friend somewhat hastily, and, what with contrary wills and winds, he often found himself drifting in a different direction from that which he fancied he desired. Possibly, had he really been very anxious to return home, he might, in a thousand ways, have accomplished his wishes before that time.

But he was oppressed with certain qualms of conscience in regard to making Gwendoline his wife, whilst his whole heart was so full of another. He trusted, as time went

on, the impression of Ruth Maxwell would become fainter; and he tried to think of his love for and acquaintance with her as the result of a mean, unworthy plot, set afloat by his much-injured mother. Poor mother!—it was hard indeed to be the subject of such thoughts in her son's heart! But perhaps he only tried to believe he entertained the unworthy suspicion, for oftentimes that pale face and wasted form would come to him in his dreams, and clasp its gentle hands about his own, and seek to render him some little trifling service. And then he would awake, start up suddenly, and stretch out his hands to feel whether it was a reality or a delusion, till the conviction came as quickly that his mother was indeed as far removed from him as he himself had thrust her, long, long years ago, in his wayward youth.

During all this time he heard often from Gwendoline, for he constantly wrote to her,

and told her where letters were likely to reach him. Not that the letters from his betrothed gave him any particular pleasure or satisfaction—indeed, how could they in his peculiar frame of mind? But it satisfied his conscience to write and hear from Gwendoline. On her part, she tried to communicate all that occupied and amused her in the various undertakings in which she was, at the instance of her friend, engaged. Perhaps Gwendoline's details were not very lucid, or she might not quite comprehend all she wrote about; certain it is they failed in giving her cousin any idea of the magnitude of the plans she proposed, or the works she had already engaged in. It was a relief to Louis's mind to find that Gwendoline was not pining in his absence, and that she was, as he believed, employing her time pleasantly and profitably, and was also well satisfied to hear she had such a coadjutor in all her proceedings as Miss Winyard. He only

knew of her in regard to her beauty and misfortunes, and gave her credit for every good quality that was inherent in her father's house, so he wrote :—

"I am very glad, dearest Gwen, that you have found such a pleasant friend in Miss Winyard, and that she is so much with you —I am aware she does not go out generally. The Winyards were always particular friends of your father and mother, and I am glad the friendship seems likely to be continued in their children. I know very little of the family myself, having been, of late years, so much away from your place; but I hope, in the years to come, to improve the acquaintance. In the meantime, you cannot do better than cultivate it as much as lies in your power, as you may be sure every member of that family will always find a welcome in my house."

Thus encouraged, Gwendoline proceeded on her way, sacrificing to friendship, not

only on her own account, but on that of her lover also. Mr. Lloyd had not been encouraged to write to the ex-guardian, for Mr. Beaumont had decidedly informed him his power was at an end, and that Miss Powys was her own mistress; but it was very evident she had another, who began to take complete possession of her every thought, word, and action. It was a pleasing bondage, or Gwendoline would at once have rebelled; but there was a sort of dreamy mysticism in all Miss Winyard's projects, that fascinated, whilst they almost bewildered Gwendoline's better judgment.

The week of Madeline's first visit drew to an end before either of the friends were at all prepared to part; and as Maude had received various invitations during the time of her stay at General Winyard's, it was agreed that Madeline should continue at Rhys Castle until Miss Beaumont came back to stay.

It cannot be supposed that a person of Miss Winyard's excitable imagination should continue all that time an occupant of the tapestry chamber, with all its weird associations, and not become in some way affected by them. For the first few nights nothing seemed likely to transpire, but when Madeline had slept there for a little time, she began to be restless, and apparently uneasy as the hour drew near for separating for the night; but as Madeline never said anything, Gwendoline always wished her good night as usual, when she betook herself to her own smaller but more cheerful-looking room.

The nights were so short then, that Gwendoline would not have any light in her bedroom, and in fact generally slept till it had been full daylight for some time. On one particular night she found herself starting awake from a sudden flash of light that shone full on her face for a moment, and dispelled the dreams, which were becoming

somewhat less easy than usual. Her first impression was how late it must be, thinking "the sun seldom shines so full into my room till late in the day;" and she closed her eyes again in the weariness of unsatisfied slumber. She lay for a few minutes, almost dozing off again, when the sensation of a hand placed on her arm (which lay outside the covering) made her start up again with returning consciousness. Then becoming more fully awake, she saw the light was not that of the cheerful sun, but of a lamp which was now turned full upon her face as before, and it was held by the hand of her friend Madeline, whilst the other was placed gently but firmly on her arm. Gwendoline became fully alive to all this in a moment—the rest of the room lay in shadow, and the figure that stood by her bed came out in full Rembrandt relief, reflected by the light she held.

"What is it, Madeline?" was Gwendo-

line's first exclamation, half frightened at the sudden shock of being roused, and rather annoyed at the untimely hour chosen for the visitation. Then, as no answer came, Gwendoline looked again at the figure by her side, and as Miss Winyard remained motionless in her long white garment, and with her beautiful hair all unbound, like a dusky cloud round her marble-white face, Gwendoline felt frightened, and asked again, "What is the matter, dear? You are ill, I fear! Come, let me take you back into your room." But still no answer. Then Gwendoline started up and looked nearer, and perceived Madeline's eyes were fixed, though wide open, and her pale lips moved, though no sound came from them. "She is walking in her sleep," thought Gwendolinne, feeling for a moment that sort of chill which is produced by the bodily presence of one whose mind is all unconscious of its actions. And then in a moment she remem-

bered that Kate Winyard had once spoken of her sister as having been subject to somnambulism, after her first attack of illness, and occasionally given to it when suffering from over-excitement in any way. A feeling of pitying kindness immediately took the place of all other in Gwendoline's brave little heart, and she quietly withdrew her arm from her friend's grasp, and slipping out of bed, put on her light wrapper, and gently guided Madeline back to her own apartment, feeling but too thankful to see her lie down quietly on the great solemn-looking couch, and soon after fall into a deep, quiet slumber.

The next morning Miss Winyard looked fagged, and very white and languid, and told Gwendoline she had been very uneasy about her all the night past; that she had dreamt of her incessantly, and tried to protect her from some threatening danger, and the impression was so vivid that she felt as

if she had gone to her room to rescue her. Gwendoline, thinking it better to tell her friend the truth, that she might be guarded in future against such dangers as might befall her in that unconscious state, told her simply that she came in her sleep very quietly into her room, and that she walked as quietly with her back into hers. Gwendoline made very light of the whole matter, but Madeline remained in an excited, uneasy state of mind for a few days after. However, her own maid, who had lived with her for many years, was then allowed to sleep in the next room, observing, as she prepared to take possession,

"I knew I should have to come in a few days, for my poor dear lady has done nothing but dream dreams, and say prayers for the dead, and beg them to appear, since she has been in this ghostly room; but I'll take care none of them shall come near to her—to hurt her."

This remark of the faithful Evans was made to Miss Powys alone, for to none else would she have confided her sentiments regarding her beloved lady, but she believed that Gwendoline regarded Madeline with the same feeling of intense admiration and love as she inspired in herself and all who came under her immediate influence.

After this the friendship seemed to increase in strength, for it was evident that Madeline's visions were very full of Gwendoline, and that all that concerned her friend interested her beyond most earthly considerations.

So the time went on, and Madeline's visit was extended, whilst Maude's absence was prolonged in proportion. After Gwendoline had received Louis's letter commending her intimacy with the Winyard family, she felt at full liberty to cherish it to the uttermost, and obey the dictates of her own heart, in surrendering her judgment im-

plicitly to her friend's, and in endeavouring to carry out all the projects which became of daily and all-engrossing interest to herself as well as Miss Winyard.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER Maude Beaumont's visit to the Winyards came to an end, she found herself deeply engaged for various others. It was just the time when people in that neighbourhood were filling their houses, and anyone who had certain qualifications was sure to be eagerly entreated to become a guest at many gay, pleasant places.

Miss Beaumont possessed all these desirable qualifications, and in consequence her invitations were numerous, and she was perfectly willing to avail herself of as many as seemed likely to afford her the passing amusement she sought. Her return, therefore, to Rhys Castle was only for a few days,

to arrange her wardrobe, and fill up the slight gap which intervened between that and her next engagement. She was not sorry that her stay with Gwendoline would be so short, for she found her not only fully engrossed with a new and charming friend, and absorbed in things which were uninteresting to her, whilst they were wholly indifferent to those which formed, at that time, the sum and substance of Maude Beaumont's enjoyment. And yet, it might not have been altogether the whirl of gaiety in the abstract which was of such engrossing interest to Maude—perhaps something of her feverish desire to go from place to place in search of amusement, might be accounted for by the fact that John Penrose was also bound on the same course himself; that he, like herself, was found to be a very desirable acquisition in all the gay houses about, and was, in consequence, like herself, honoured with numerous invitations.

The visit, however, to which they both looked forward with most pleasure was that which was shortly to succeed their stay at General Winyard's. It was to some neighbours of his, of whom they had seen a good deal during their stay at Winyards. Mr. and Lady Laura Vaughan had been only dinner-guests that day—the former was Maude's pleasant dinner-companion (at that time unknown to her, even by name), whilst it was Lady Laura, his young wife, who had, on her part, proved so engrossing a neighbour on the other side to Mr. Penrose. They were, however, old acquaintances, and had seen a great deal of each other that Winter in Italy, and had become more than merely intimate. Possibly, there was one great bond of union between John Penrose and Mr. Vaughan—it was that they were both self-made men. They had risen from the middle rank of life to take their own place, as it might please them, in the great world around.

Mr. Vaugham, however, had already achieved his triumphs. His father had been a great mill-owner and cotton-spinner, and his son, who was highly educated, succeeded to immense wealth at his death. He inherited all his father's energy and business-like precision of habits, and carried on his great concerns with unabated attention to all its details; but he had lately bought a beautiful place in Wales, where it was his delight to surround his charming young wife with every luxury that wealth could command.

It had been a love-match of the purest, most disinterested kind—though, as Lady Laura was the daughter of a poor Peer, it would, of course, be said that she married Mr. Vaughan for his riches, and he, on his part, sought her for her rank. It was not so, however—they loved each other for all they saw, and sought, and found in married life. She regarded her husband as the first of human beings; and to say he worshipped

his lovely little wife, is not far short of the truth. Mr. Vaughan was a peculiar and striking-looking man, on a large scale, with a fine dark, determined face. There was a certain majesty of manner about him, which suited well with his acknowledged force of mind and general character for intellectual superiority. He was a man who was instinctively felt to be independent of the distinction of rank and position. He was rather fastidious, too, in his likings and dislikings—more so, perhaps, than might have been expected, considering his birth and origin—but Sampson Vaughan regarded none of these things. He was fond, however, of discussing subjects that touched on his particular calling in life, and had no idea of shame or concealment on the matter. By Lady Laura, the vast machinery that went to make up the stupendous sum of her husband's colossal fortune was regarded half curiously, half

playfully, as something very wonderful, but by no means degrading. How could any outward thing be degrading to such a man as her husband?

John Penrose found in this lately-wedded couple the pleasantest friends and acquaintances he had ever made in his life, and the clever, agreeable brewer of Castleford was regarded by them both with lively interest and regard. He had been engaged to visit the Vaughans that Autumn, and the meeting at General Winyard's hastened the time of his going to them.

Lady Laura took what she was pleased to term an immense fancy to Maude. She had not seen so nice a girl in that neighbourhood before. They soon made a friendship, and the invitation followed quickly, of course. Mr. Vaughan had, on his part, been struck with Maude when sitting by her at dinner the first day of her visit at Winyards. She was much impressed in his fa-

vour also, notwithstanding her pre-occupation in regard to John Penrose. She had settled in her own mind that her neighbour was somebody of importance; she saw his opinion was deferred to, and that he himself spoke with that air of decision which marks the man accustomed to be looked up to. He was young, so she supposed he might be single, and was rather speculating as to his actual history. Thus, when she came out from dinner, and found the opportunity of questioning Kate, she received quite a shock of surprise on learning all the particulars above mentioned concerning Mr. Vaughan and his bride.

The acquaintance, however, progressed, for Lady Laura, who had been admiring Maude for some time, made Mr. Penrose introduce them to each other. It was a very fortunate step for John Penrose, for Maude could not be airified or scornful to the brewer, when she saw how highly

others esteemed him, and those who must have known quite as well as herself what was really the "right thing." It was only when by any chance Maude found herself for a few moments alone with John Penrose that she allowed herself the dear delight of discouraging and teasing him by her indifference or hauteur. She could not forgive him for her own fancy about his engagement to Ruth, and though her belief in it was very much shaken, enough remained to prevent her being uniformly kind and gracious.

Thus he found himself alternately encouraged and laid low, all his hopes disappearing as if by magic, leaving him to wonder how he ever could have been fool enough to entertain them; and at a word or smile, feeling himself again raised from the depths of his despondency to the seventh heaven of hope and happiness. He had arrived at the knowledge by this time

that he really loved Maude Beaumont very fondly, very truly, and only wondered how he could ever have supposed it possible to relinquish her, and to turn his thoughts to another. He now found himself, in truth, far nearer to her than he had ever been before, as regarded his social position.

Mr. Penrose was evidently considered on an equal footing with Miss Beaumont. No one would have looked or felt surprised had an engagement between them been announced, and quite as many would have been ready to say that she was a lucky girl as that he was a fortunate man.

Still things remained in the same state when Maude took her leave, and went back for the short interval to Gwendoline's house. She told her, cursorily, that Mr. Penrose was at the General's; and Gwendoline opened her eyes, and wondered he could be always leaving Miss Maxwell in that way. To which Maude made answer,

"Why, my dear Gwen, people might say just the same thing of you and Louis at this moment; but I suppose it is the fashion." And Gwendoline, on due consideration, meekly replied she "supposed so too."

Maude soon afterwards set off on her career of visits. At some of the houses she met Mr. Penrose, and at others only heard of him as just gone, or coming after her own departure. At many of them she met her new friends, the Vaughans, with whom she had already spent a short time, but they petitioned for a longer visit after her general tour was ended. And then it was that she and John Penrose met once more, with the comfortable assurance on either side of passing a week or two in each other's society. There were only a few pleasant people besides themselves staying in the house for a certain time, and none of the bustle which attends a constant change and

succession of guests. Thus all the party drifted into an easy and independent mode of life and amusement that was very enjoyable.

The Vaughans' place was very beautiful, and known as Llandhas Priory. It was secluded enough to preserve all the picturesque privacy of its romantic pleasure-grounds, and yet sufficiently near the outer world to secure all facilities of seeing and amusing such friends as might find their way there. That it was a time of almost bewildering happiness to John Penrose, may easily be imagined; whilst on Maude's part the enjoyment was of a very mixed nature, fearing she might appear to concede too much, whilst she considered that everything which regarded Mr. Penrose was in far too dubious a state to allow of her feeling much pleasure in his society. Still the sentiment, whatever it might be, that she entertained for him, grew and flourished, in spite of all

her efforts to keep it under due control. She became very fond of Lady Laura, who was quite charming in her way, and really loved Maude with all the love she had to spare from the husband she openly worshipped. Maude always admired the naïve and candid manner in which she spoke of Mr. Vaughan's manufactories, and the "hands" employed there. She wondered if ever she should have liked to talk about—well, "such things." She never said "Brewery," even in her thoughts.

It happened one day that the gentlemen were for the most part gone shooting (for it was the beginning of September), and Lady Laura and Maude had driven over to take luncheon. On their way to the appointed spot, one of the ponies took fright at a gun shot accidentally too near; and though there was no harm done, Lady Laura, who was driving, became alarmed, and begged her husband to drive her and

Miss Beamont home, her only attendant being a young groom, whom she dared not trust with the reins. It was not very convenient to Mr. Vaughan to do so, as he had some stranger guests with him that morning, whom he did not like leaving, so Mr. Penrose's ready offer to take his place and drive the ladies home was gratefully accepted. The groom was desired to walk back, and Maude took his place; whilst John Penrose occupied that of Lady Laura, who sat by him. The drive was not a very long one, and Lady Laura began to lament her cowardice, and having spoiled Mr. Penrose's morning amusement.

"Never mind that," said he; "I am quite as well satisfied with all that has fallen to my share in driving you home." And then, as he helped them out of the carriage, Lady Laura said she was tired, and would go and rest quietly a little while, and she turned into the house to do so; Mr.

Penrose remained standing on the steps near Maude, who was apparently watching the ponies being led away. Then he said, rather abruptly, "It is too soon to go in, unless you also are tired."

"No, I am not tired," replied Maude.

"Then will you walk? This is such a pretty place—you have not half seen it yet. Let me show you a spot I do not think you have visited yet."

"Very well," said Maude. "Only be sure you know the way. I have no fancy for being benighted on the mountain top."

Mr. Penrose looked as if he thought there might be a worse fate even than that in such company. However, he only replied, "You may trust me." And the two set off on their walk.

John Penrose hardly knew in himself with what intention, or whether he had any, he had asked Maude to walk with him. It seemed a bold request, for she had never

done so before. They had for the most part been so hedged in by society, and by the constant interruption consequent thereon, that he never recollected having spent a whole undisturbed hour in her company before. Maude too was wondering a little, but she thought, "We have spoilt his day's sport, and it would be ill-natured to send him out to walk alone."

And so they proceeded on their walk. John Penrose could talk well on most subjects, and was generally supposed to be an amusing companion, and Maude Beaumont was specially noted for her talent for small talk and lively repartee. But on the present occasion the mantle of silence and dulness seemed to have fallen upon both of them, stifling all their usual lively and pleasant faculties.

At last Mr. Penrose roused himself to make sundry remarks upon the scenery around them, to which Maude made all due

response, of "very fine," or "grand," or "lovely," as might be required. At last he opened upon a more promising subject, as he pointed out to Maude the distant site of some building or bridge of a very expensive kind, that Mr. Vaughan was about to erect, to gratify some chance wish expressed by his wife. They both agreed how well it would look on that spot, and how pleased Lady Laura would be to find it so quickly done.

"Yes," said Maude. "She has only to conceive a wish, and, like Fairyland, she beholds it gratified. Yes, hers is decidedly a pleasant life!"

"And what must *his* be? The husband who has it in his power to gratify every desire of the wife he loves so! I can conceive no human happiness more complete."

"Yes; I have always thought them a very happy couple," said Maude.

"Then you do not think that any in-

equality of—of position, or rank, is any objection in their case?"

"If they do not object to it themselves, I am sure I do not," returned Maude, rather mockingly.

Mr. Penrose looked a shade or two more serious as he answered,

"But you seem to think that an objection might be made in their case?"

"I think objections may be made in every case that exists in the world; or, at least, that people will always be found to raise them, if so inclined. But I really do not see any myself in the present instance."

"I am sincerely glad of that," said John Penrose.

Maude looked a little provoked, but not caring to remain silent, she observed,

"Mr. Vaughan has certainly bestowed all the good things of this world upon Lady Laura; and he is a very superior person

himself. So I don't think she has anything to complain of."

"And yet he is a—a manufacturer."

"Well, and what of that? If he wasn't, the chances are he would have none of those good things to give her."

"Well, perhaps he is an exceptional person, being, as you say, so superior himself. But do you know, Miss Beaumont," said John Penrose, with sudden effort, "I have been often tempted, of late, to renounce *my* calling?"

"What, give up the Brewery? Oh! Mr. Penrose, what would your late uncle say to that? I think his shade would rise up to reproach you for such a falling away."

"It would be only a shadow, in that case, and if I could secure substantial good in so doing, I should be much inclined to make the venture."

"But," replied Maude, making a bold venture, "what would Miss Maxwell say to that?"

"Oh!" replied he, wholly unconscious of her deeper meaning, and only thinking she alluded to the interest possessed by Miss Maxwell in the Brewery, "she has told me, when I mentioned it first to her, that she would be satisfied to leave everything to my arrangement in regard to her affairs. Of course they must be considered first, in such a case; but I know her advice is to keep up the business, for the sake of the people employed in it."

"Then really, Mr. Penrose, I do not see why you should talk to anyone else about it. If Miss Maxwell has settled the matter for you, that must be enough for you."

"Not at all. You must not be displeased with my venturing to name this to you, because—because—you must know, if there was any one thing I could do that might make you consider me more worthy of you, would I not do it? You must have seen

that long ago, and what has Miss Maxwell to do with that?"

"But are you not engaged to her?" asked Maude, steadily.

CHAPTER IX.

AS soon as Maude came in from her walk that afternoon, she ran quickly upstairs to Lady Laura's dressing-room, where she knew she should find her resting at that hour.

"Can I come to you for half an hour, Laura? Are you sure nobody will disturb us? I must have half an hour's chat with you."

"Come in, dear, and sit down here; we shall be very cosy—no one is likely to invade us. Georgie and Emily are both out sketching, and Charlie Melville is with them. They will not return, I daresay, till it is too dark to see any longer, and Bessie Stanley

is in her nursery, so I shall have no visitors this evening."

Thus re-assured, Maude came in. The two young ladies referred to, "Georgie" and "Emily," were cousins of Lady Laura's, and Captain Melville was also a distant cousin, supposed to be devoted to one or both of the young ladies above-named. Mrs. Stanley was the wife of Colonel Stanley, and Mr. Vaughan's only sister, a very handsome, talented woman, much liked and admired by men, but not very popular with the generality of women, who considered her rather "too clever." There were no other ladies staying in the house besides Maude at that time. One or other of them generally came in to chat with the lady of the house when she was taking her evening's rest at tea-time.

"I am glad they are all so well employed," said Maude, "for I want you all to myself this next half hour."

"Well, let me give you some tea first, for you look tired and pale. I fear you have not got over the fright I gave you with the ponies."

"Oh! yes, I have been tolerably composed on that account for some time, only my nerves have received another shock in the shape of a proposal from Mr. Penrose, not long ago."

"My dear Maude!" exclaimed Lady Laura, raising herself hastily from her couch, and looking inquiringly into her friend's face —"are you serious? I am so glad if it is so! We both like Mr. Penrose so much! But—do you mean that you have—refused him?"

This last query was put hesitatingly, as Maude made no sign of response to Lady Laura's expressions of gladness, and never raised her eyes from a hand-screen which she held in her hand. She only answered,

"Not exactly—in fact, Laura, I have as

yet neither refused nor accepted him. It took me quite by surprise, and I hardly know what to say, so I am come to consult you on the momentous subject."

"But surely, Maude, dear, you know whether you like Mr. Penrose well enough to marry him—don't you?"

After a short pause, Maude replied, in a low voice,

"I fear I do."

"Then why not tell him so at once, dear, and put him out of his pain?—unless, indeed, there may be any reasons against your accepting him with which I am unacquainted; but as you say you are come to consult me, I suppose his case is not hopeless, and all that we have seen and heard of Mr. Penrose is so much in his favour that I cannot help wishing him success—that is, if you really like him, dear—not unless, for the whole world, would I wish you to accept him. Now, will you

please tell me what are the *cons* as well as *pros* in the case?"

"Oh! there is much to be said on both sides—more than you can imagine, Lady Laura. But I will tell you candidly I *do* like Mr. Penrose well enough to marry him, but I have always fought against the feeling, because——"

"Because why, dear?"

"He is the Brewer of Castleford, and you know my brother's place is very near, and till of late years we never dreamt of associating with people in business in the town."

"One of the modern improvements," replied Lady Laura, laughing. "You know what *I* must think on that subject, as my husband is a manufacturer—at least, all his family were—and if you could tell, Maude, how proud I am of him! It is my opinion that he ennobles every condition in life by belonging to it. You know, too, he is in

Parliament. He is barely thirty, and yet he has been three years member for the place where he was born, and where the Vaughans have been known for long years past. I wish you could see how Sampson is beloved and looked up to there, and not only there, but in the House, when he speaks, they all listen to him, and party men care for what he says, and great public men are guided by his opinion; and when I go to the house to hear him—oh! Maude, how I venerate my husband! and would not change the honour and glory of being his wife, and the chosen of that great, good heart, for that of being the wife of the proudest peer in the realm. I often wonder how it is that I should have such a happy lot given to me. Now, Maude, forgive my having said so much about myself and my own happiness, but it is the only answer I can make to *that* objection. Have you any other?"

But Maude was silent—she was overcome by the force of her friend's wifely enthusiasm, and she felt her own sentiments rather weak and pitiful when submitted to such a comparison. She did not like either to say she had been encouraging another man, even to the very verge of acceptance, in the intervals of her fluctuating regard for John Penrose; and that, not from any particular preference of the man himself, but from the feeling that it would be a desirable position to become the wife of Sir Digby Ferrers, and the mistress of his beautiful place. And yet she knew, whenever she had been momentarily tempted to accept him, and secure that desirable position, that a feeling of utter repulsion would come over her, and deter her from making the sacrifice.

There was no doubt she did like John Penrose, and him only, in a way likely to secure her happiness, if her foolish pride did not step in and interfere to prevent it.

No doubt he was a man of talent, refined by education and travel, and withal possessing qualities to ensure her respect as well as love, and yet she hesitated. The same family feeling was at work that had operated on her uncle and her brother when they disowned and cast off their mother. Then Maude for the first time began to wish she had a mother—one whom she could consult at that important crisis of her life with full, unbounded confidence, and by whose judgment, tempered with affection, she might be guided.

Mr. Vaughan was an exceptional man, and his wife's love for him beyond the usual measure of all common attachment and adoration, and every profession of regard seemed tame when compared with hers. She felt unable to lay all the doubts and difficulties of her peculiar case before her friend, as she had intended, hoping to be in some measure re-assured and guided by her. Mr.

Vaughan was a rising public man, as well as distinguished in his private career. How she wished that John Penrose was also in Parliament, and making himself known in that way! At last, after a few desultory remarks, she volunteered the information.

"Mr. Penrose has offered to give up that dreadful Brewery if I accept him; and he has also resolved on becoming the purchaser of such a pretty place called 'Waterfells,' about ten miles from Castleford."

"Oh! that is quite right, to give you a nice place. I am sure you deserve one, Maude. But why should he give up such a profitable concern as I have heard his Brewery is?"

Then Maude proceeded to explain how much he had been annoyed at late events connected with it, and how he thought that it would please her if he should drop the whole concern.

"But do you really wish it, Maude?"

"I hardly know; but I am not partial to trade in any of its branches."

"But if you are partial to the man who makes his fortune by it, and in doing so becomes a great and influential man in his neighbourhood, and no doubt influences (as my husband does) the fortunes and happiness of so many who depend upon him, would it not be a pity, Maude, to take advantage of his love for you and some passing disgust (which he ought to live down instead of encouraging) to throw everything over so early in life and quit the path in which it has been appointed him to tread?"

"Ah! if it had been anything else—something less ignoble than making beer—really, Lady Laura, you cannot defend the occupation!"

"No; nor can I say that spinning cotton and making calico are very grand employments; but I have told you what I think

about it. We are obliged to do such things in civilized countries, and make large fortunes by them, so we ought to be thankful to the master-minds who direct them and do good, not only to themselves, but to thousands of their fellow-creatures in pursuing these homely avocations. Now, tell me, Maude, if you can, on what footing you intend to meet Mr. Penrose this evening? Will you go in to dinner with him?"

"I really am hardly prepared to say," replied Maude, with unusual hesitation.

"You ought to decide one way or the other, dear," said Lady Laura, leaving her sofa, and coming up to her friend, and putting her pretty hand caressingly on Maude's shoulder, as she sat on the low chair near the wood-fire which always burnt in that pleasant room, and was encouraged more for the sake of the appearance than the want of warmth.

Maude turned her face round, and its ex-

pression of doubt and uneasiness caught Lady Laura's quick eye, and she exclaimed,

"No, don't accept him, Maude. I see you cannot resolve with all your heart to overlook that which seems so great an objection in your eyes, so do not torment him —he is too good for that! If you can't love him for himself, he will soon see it, and be miserable."

"But," said Maude, "I feel as if I should be very unhappy if I let him go away, and we were never to meet again—or only as indifferent acquaintances."

"Well, you must settle it, then, your own way. I could have wished you had been a little more decided, Maude; but perhaps, in a day or two, you may know your own mind better."

"I hope I may. And now, dear, I hear people about, and Mr. Vaughan, or some one, will be coming to you, so I had better take my leave. Thank you so much for listening to my prose."

And then Maude rose, and left her friend to her own reflections, until her husband looked in, according to custom, on his way to his dressing-room; and without delay, he was put in possession of all the circumstances regarding Mr. Penrose and Miss Beaumont; but certain it is he made more allowance for Maude's perplexities and indecision than his charming little wife could be brought to do.

He was a thorough man of the world, and less romantic than his wife. He had won his own distinction in society by his exceptional talents, both in public and private life; but it did not follow that every man might have the same powers or opportunities for exercising them as himself. So he said, on hearing the case duly recited by his wife, and in answer to her inquiry, "Now, Sampson, dearest, what can be done for that nice, dear girl, who won't know her own mind, or, rather, who I see

loves him very dearly, but cannot be brought to like that which is part and parcel of himself, and will, perhaps, if she accepts him with this incumbrance, make him miserable on that account, or even throw him over at last."

"In that case, then, if I were Mr. Penrose, I should be half inclined to let the Brewery go, and secure such a charming wife. He would, I daresay, be tolerably well off without it; and as to his people, no doubt he would see to their welfare in disposing of the business."

Lady Laura opened her lovely eyes.

"Why, my dearest, you have kept all your affairs going on just as they were when we married, and I would not ask you to change a single thing you do, or ever have done. In my opinion, any change from what is, would be for the worse."

"Thank you, darling!" with a kiss of acknowledgment. "But what is applica-

ble to one man's circumstances, may not be to another. You only hear distant reports of the business in which I am still engaged, and from which we derive too large an income to give it up easily. We are far removed, between this and London, from any local disagreeables which a nearer residence might entail; but that has little to do with Penrose's affairs. He is the best judge of them, and if he is willing to make a certain sacrifice to please Miss Beaumont, or her friends, there can be no substantial reason against it. I grant you she might appear higher-minded if she disregarded such circumstances, and professed herself willing to take up her abode in Castleford as the Brewer's wife; but I can fancy her having certain objections which may not be altogether unreasonable, or inconsistent with the ideas natural to her bringing up, and she is right not to act too hastily in defiance of them."

"But, dearest, Mr. Penrose is going to buy a beautiful place about ten miles out of Castleford, so Maude need not trouble herself about the Brewery."

"Well, if they are really attached, no doubt they will get over the difficulty between them. Miss Beaumont is really a charming person, and very handsome; she is, I believe, of age, and her own mistress, so there is nothing to prevent a happy ending, if they are so disposed."

"But she has a brother?"

"Yes; and he, I heard, was on the point of marrying his cousin, the heiress of Rhys Castle, so there is an additional reason why your friend should look out for herself."

"Yes, and Maude has told me she has next to nothing in the way of fortune."

"It is lucky, then, Penrose has enough for both, even if he disposes of the Brewery. He is the partner, also, in a flourishing bank in Castleford."

"Maude said nothing about that."

"I suppose she considers it a less objectionable calling." And then the husband and wife left their friends' affairs, and discussed others of more peculiar interest to themselves; and in due time the whole party were assembled in the drawing-room before dinner.

It was quite early in September, but the evenings at eight o'clock had begun to be dark and chilly, so both fire and lamps were lighted before dinner.

Maude felt very strange as she entered the cheerful-looking room where the hum of conversation was going on in the usual way, and people laughing, and talking, and relating the experiences of their different morning's employments. The two girls who had been sketching were, with their attendant squire, exhibiting their drawings, and such of the party as were qualified were giving an opinion on their merits. Mrs.

Stanley was talking German very fast with an old professor from Munich, who was a family friend of long standing, and was now staying at the Priory. He had been roaming about all the morning by himself, most happily, and was recounting the discoveries he had made to his delighted and attentive auditor, whose sensible remarks and judicious inquiries added greatly to his enjoyment. Lady Laura was leaning back, half hidden in a capacious arm-chair by the fireside, listening lazily to a conversation between her husband and one of the sportsmen of that morning concerning some event that had happened, and not quite agreeing as to the locality in which it had occurred. But whilst she appeared thus employed, her eyes were wandering restlessly towards the door by which she knew Maude would enter, and from thence to a table a little apart, by which Mr. Penrose stood, under the light of a lamp, looking over, or pre-

tending to scan the columns of the evening papers lately come in. She saw him look up nervously as Maude came in, and placed herself on the nearest seat. He did not move, however, and the talk went on, and no one observed anything, or thought about the pair who were now debating that most momentous question in their future lives.

Dinner was announced. People began to pair off; all did as they liked in that pleasant house, where there were no chance guests or great people to be considered. So the young men appropriated the young ladies, and the professor carried off his charming Mrs. Stanley; and then ——John Penrose hesitated for a moment; he looked, and fancied he detected a glance —it was hardly visible, but he took Maude in that day to dinner.

CHAPTER X.

WHILST Maude's matrimonial affairs thus hung trembling in the balance, her brother Louis was approaching the term of his bachelor career. His yachting expedition was nearly over, and he wrote to Gwendoline to tell her he should come and see her immediately he landed. His stay at Rhys Castle would be short, as he wished to put everything in train for their immediate marriage, and he intended going to London for that purpose a few days after. He expected, when there, to be joined by his sister and cousin, according to their previous plan, and to make certain purchases. As it had been agreed, the marriage was to take

place in Wales; the ladies would return there, and he hoped to follow them as soon as Gwendoline gave him permission to do so. Louis wrote this letter with some deliberation; it seemed like signing and sealing his own fate, but he felt, in consideration to his cousin, it could not be longer delayed. It was then six months since the engagement had been entered into, and, for the last three or four, he had never seen her once! Well! she was everything that a man could seek in a wife—the realization, even, of the Italian *mot*, which says one word in its various modifications expresses all the qualifications to be desired in a wife, beginning with the all-comprehensive one of "*amore*," and gradually diminishing it into the words—"*more*," "*ore*," "*re*"—in which everything is comprised.

Louis Beaumont was still sailing about in Sir Francis Hardy's yacht. They were coasting the south of England, and were to separ-

ate at Plymouth. At the time Louis wrote to Gwendoline, he was stopping for a couple of days at a retired sea-place, where his friend had left him in command whilst he went to visit an old acquaintance who lived in the neighbourhood, and with whom he wished to take a day or two's shooting. Louis was much pressed to make one of the party, but he had declined. He was feeling unsettled and restless, and in no mood to play the agreeable in a strange house, so, after a few ineffectual entreaties, Sir Francis Harding went his way, and left Louis alone in his yacht.

He rather enjoyed his solitary position, as regarded kindred fellowship. He could saunter listlessly about the deck, cigar in mouth, from morning to evening, without being called upon to give an opinion, or to express a sentiment. It was quite enough of creature companionship to watch the men performing their usual avocations above and

below, or occasionally exchanging a few words with the Captain, who was an intelligent man and clever sailor. Thus the two days passed away, and one of the boats was despatched into harbour to fetch the master of the yacht home. It returned, however, only bearing a note to say Sir Francis was unavoidably detained another day, but hoped that Mr. Beaumont would consent to join the party at the house where he was staying for a ball that evening, proposing to return together early the next morning, and then, wind and weather being favourable, to sail for Plymouth. Louis felt strangely indisposed for the proffered piece of gaiety; besides he had not taken balls into consideration when he consented so hastily to accompany his friend, and, on various accounts, found it expedient to decline the pressing invitation sent by Sir Francis.

Instead, therefore, of making his appearance, as hoped for, he sent his excuses, at

the same time expressing his perfect contentment in the life he was leading, and willingness to wait his friend's return at the appointed time. When the boat was about to start with this note, it suddenly struck Louis that he might as well vary the scene a little that same afternoon by going and returning in it—saying he should like to spend an hour on shore, and look at the place, which seemed pretty and picturesque enough in the distance.

Louis was accordingly disembarked at the little pier or jetty which was the usual landing-place, and thence proceeded to saunter away in quest of such amusement as might present itself. There was nothing very attractive to be found. The visitors seemed few, and those chiefly of the invalid kind. The town could not boast of a railroad, so was rather out of the way of common watering-place guests. Still there was something very quaint and pretty in the mixture

of small dwelling-houses, and trees, and shrubs, dotting the side of the cliff, which rose abruptly from the sea-shore. There were no terraces or esplanades to disfigure the simple beauty of the landscape, as viewed from the landing-place to which Louis soon found himself returning, his unprofitable survey being ended.

"And yet," thought he to himself, "I could like this quiet little sea-place in certain company, far better than a fashionable watering-place full of noisy children, flirting girls, and husband-hunting mammas."

The thought was not altogether an amiable or a right one, all things considered, for certain it is that Gwendoline's form occupied no place in his imaginary landscape—but a well-remembered face and perfect figure rose up to fill the place that should have been assigned to her. His truant fancy pictured to him what the delight might have been in wandering about in that quiet, se-

questered spot, with that figure at his side, and looking up to him with those deep, thoughtful eyes which always appeared to him unlike any other eyes he had ever looked into before.

"And yet," thought he, "there was no reality in it all. She was playing her part, like all the rest of them! Well, I am happily out of the meshes, though so nearly caught!"

And then, as if it had been an apparition, called up by his thoughts, did he see, not far from him, near to the extremity of the pier, the same graceful figure which ever haunted his recollections. It was dressed with extreme, almost severe simplicity—all in grey, a long, grey, soft, clinging dress, with some sort of falling mantle of the same colour, and a grey felt hat, with one small feather curling round the crown. The figure walked in front of him, and the face was consequently turned the other way, but there

was no mistaking the peculiar graceful outline and walk which were clearly discernible, though the evening was growing late, and a sort of mist gave an uncertain, ghostly appearance to objects in general. But, in the midst of all, that single grey figure, almost floating away in the distance, stood out clear and luminous, with a strange distinctness in his eyes. At first he fancied her alone; for though he kept saying to himself, "It can't be her at this place, and of course it is only a strange resemblance in form and motion," yet he felt a certain conviction that when the figure in front of him should turn round, he should see the face as well as form of Ruth Maxwell. He had thought she was alone, till he saw that an invalid-chair was being wheeled along not far from her, and was only brought to see it was so by observing the object of his contemplation step across the intervening distance, and address whoever might be the occupant of the same

vehicle. Then another thought came hotly to his heart, causing it to burn within him, as it suggested, "It is her mother—and *mine!*"

He lagged behind; he feared to encounter the eyes of the two women who so dearly loved him. But the delay was useless; he was obliged to go to the end of the pier to seek his boat, and the chair came to a standstill there, and the invalid within appeared to find amusement from watching the movements of the sailors as they lay to, expecting their passenger. Louis determined not to look in the direction of the chair, or of the silent figure which stood at a little distance, leaning over the rails at the side of the jetty. His heart beat quickly as he prepared to pass, for the chair was drawn up, inadvertently so near as to obstruct the entrance to the steps leading down to the water.

It seemed, as he hesitated, that the lady in

the chair became suddenly aware that she was obstructing the passage, and gave directions for her servant to move on one side. That order brought a sensation of relief to his mind in a moment. It was *not* his mother who was being wheeled about in that dismal manner—and he felt glad it was not her—and he might have been mistaken as to the other figure also; yet, as he glanced in that direction as it stood by the rails, a hand happened to be raised to brush back the hair which the breeze had loosened from its smooth bands, and—it could be none other, he knew the little movement so well! But on the other side there remained the chair, and a voice proceeded from a veiled figure within, which he felt sure could no more belong to his mother than the long bony hand (from which the glove had been withdrawn) that lay on the side of the chair. Louis paused, as the chair was being wheeled back a little, and raising his hat as he passed,

murmured a few words of acknowledgment. This was answered by the lady of the long bony hand saying,

"Ah, Mr. Beaumont, is it really you? I had no idea you were in this part of the world."

Thus suddenly addressed, Louis could not at the moment recollect who the speaker was, though the voice seemed familiar. The lady, perceiving this, raised her thick veil for a moment, saying,

"I daresay you will hardly know me, for I am shockingly altered; but I am Miss Wheeler."

"To be sure! it was very stupid in me not to remember; but the evening is getting thick and dusk, and I must remind you, also, that your veil is somewhat the same; but I hope you are not ill?"

"Yes, I am, and have long been ill, but I think rather better for coming here. Lady Cunliffe insists on giving me every chance,

which is very good of her; so, as this place was recommended, she kindly brought me."

"Yes, it seems a very quiet place;" and again after a moment Louis observed, "And I suppose you and Lady Cunliffe are alone here?"

Miss Wheeler was still alive enough to all that was going on in the world, to detect the almost imperceptible glance cast on the leaning figure at a little distance, and which appeared rooted to one spot, and by no means disposed to join the *tête-à-tête* which had so suddenly sprung up. She therefore turned her own looks more openly in that direction, and said,

"We are alone, and we are not, for although we have our separate abodes, Mrs. and Miss Maxwell are also here, and came at the same time; and though they have another house, we meet every day and almost live together. It is very pleasant, in this out of the way place."

"Indeed it must be," replied Louis with energy; then suddenly recalling his own grievances, he said, "Not that it is a place that I should particularly fancy."

"I can easily imagine that," replied Miss Wheeler; then immediately added, "But I am detaining you. I suppose it is your boat that is waiting for you at the foot of the stairs; we heard you were yachting, but had no idea that we had any chance of meeting. Good evening."

Louis responded, and took the bony hand in his. He had a thousand things he longed to say, but it seemed impossible to do so. The men were waiting for him, and the tide was turning, so he knew he must not delay his departure, but still he felt he could hardly tear himself away without one word or inquiry. So he hazarded a hasty one, saying,

"I am sorry your health has brought you here, though glad to have seen you. I hope your friends have not come for the same reason."

"My friends? Oh, you are thinking of the Maxwells. Yes, Mrs. Maxwell is something of an invalid, so her good daughter persuaded her to come when we did. It is a great comfort."

"Yes, but you are better?" asked Louis, lingering.

"Yes, thank you, I find the air does me good. I quite enjoy sitting on this little pier, and seeing all that is to be seen."

"Then I suppose you come here every day."

"Yes, both morning and evening; but it is time for me to go in now."

And so they parted—Sophy full of speculations that, strange to say, were void of selfishness or jealousy; and Louis in a perfect turmoil of excitement, called forth by the outline of that graceful grey figure seen only in the distance, and even then its presence more *felt* than actually discerned.

With the earliest dawn of day Louis

was up, pacing the deck, and longing for the time when he could order the boat to take him again to that landing-place where, without any definite object or intention, all his thoughts seemed feverishly to cling. Miss Wheeler had told him where she was to be found, and she was now apparently the friend and constant companion of Ruth Maxwell—though what was she, or what could she ever be to him?

Well, he contrived to put some curb upon his impatience, and did not reach the jetty till about twelve o'clock. When he did arrive, he had the satisfaction of seeing the invalid-chair placed so as to catch the fresh sea-breeze, and its occupant of the preceding evening sitting there alone, and reading under the shelter of a comfortably-contrived sun-shade, that turned everyway without the trouble of holding. There was no servant in waiting, as the evening before. It was evident that the

daily arrangement was to take the chair there, and fetch it away when the appointed time was come.

"But," said Louis, when Sophy had explained this proceeding, "are not you afraid to be left alone, lest you might get tired or weary of waiting before the time came for you to be fetched?"

"Oh! no fear of that. I am very seldom alone; my good friend Ruth always comes with me, and either brings her book, or walks up and down, if it is cold."

"I do not see her this morning," said Louis, his voice almost trembling with anxiety as he added—"But perhaps you expect her soon?"

"No, I do *not*," returned Miss Wheeler, with decided emphasis; "she is not intending to come this morning, but probably Lady Cunliffe will soon appear; but, you know, she makes slow progress when she does set off on a walk. She always has so much to

say or to see by the way, that she rarely arrives in any given time."

"And you are staying here for your health?" said Louis, not caring to manifest the devouring disappointment he was enduring.

"Yes, but without much hope of mending it, still less of restoring it. It is only a work of time—whether it is a few weeks or months that will see the end."

"And you can think of it so calmly?" asked the young man curiously; for there was a certain degree of awe to him in this near contemplation and communication with one who was so consciously passing away—one to whom this world, with its passing cares, joys, and sorrows, would so soon be as nothing.

"Yes," returned Miss Wheeler, with quiet earnestness, "I am thankful to say I can;" and she looked at him full in the face with those deep-set, searching eyes, and

added—"Yes, I can, thanks to Ruth Maxwell."

Louis bent his head, but replied nothing; his lip quivered, and he seemed anxious to speak, but his words died away before they were uttered. Miss Wheeler sat for some little time leaning back in her chair, with her thin hand shading her face, after she had said that; then she suddenly removed it, and in a low, hurried voice, went on—

"Mr. Beaumont, I am so glad to have seen you at last. It is what I have wished and prayed for, for I have so longed to make a little confession to you!"

"To *me!*" exclaimed Louis, hardly comprehending.

"Yes; it is nothing about my wretched self, only I hope I am a different person now from what I was in my days of envy, hatred, and uncharitableness."

"Oh! Miss Wheeler, pray don't say such hard things against yourself!"

"I would not say them except to explain why I tried to injure Ruth Maxwell in the estimation of your sister and cousin. I had no cause of dislike to her, only I envied her because she was young and good and beautiful, and, far more than all, beloved. Yes, I saw it all!—but there is no use in talking of it now—it is all passed on your part, and you care now for another; but it was pain and grief to me to see what I perceived between you—it was nothing but envy, so I told Miss Beaumont things that were not true of her; but I need not have done it, for you deserted her without."

Louis did not reply for a moment, and then he said,

"You never did her a moment's harm with me, for I never believed ill of her till —till I knew it."

"And what ill did you ever imagine of the best and purest-minded woman that ever breathed?"

"This, that she, knowing our family history (of course you know it), suffered me to become—well, to care for her, without giving me the shadow of a hint as to who she was."

Sophy Wheeler fixed her flashing eyes upon him, and said, "It is false!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE two looked at each other in silence after Sophy had vented her indignation so briefly; and yet the exertion it cost her seemed great, for she put her hand to her side and panted heavily for a few moments. Then, recovering herself with some effort, she said,

"These are unpleasant subjects to discuss, Mr. Beaumont, but I should like to do what little justice I can at the end of my life. It has been sufficiently unprofitable for the most part, but I am not going to trouble you with what concerns you so little, either in my shortcomings or regret for them. All I wished to say was in justice

to Ruth Maxwell; but you have utterly astonished and confounded me by the accusation you have just brought against her."

"You mean to say, Miss Wheeler, that it is an invention, a fabrication of my own?" replied Louis, with the angry flush still mantling on his brow.

"Pardon me when I said it was false—I meant the allegation, by whomsoever it was made—and yet," she exclaimed, with sudden recollection, "perhaps you might be excused (if you had not known her so well) for the unworthy suspicion; for of course there were those who knew all about her—her aunt, her step-mother—and yet made no sign which might have saved her from all the sorrow that has come upon her."

"But how could she be ignorant of the connexion between the two families?—of her step-mother's former name? It is inconceivable!"

"It may seem so to you and some others.

I can only tell you, as far as I know, that Ruth knew nothing of what you mention, and that the poor lady most deeply injured and concerned felt the stigma put upon her so intensely that even to those nearest and dearest to her she never mentioned the subject. Do not be angry with me, Mr. Beaumont, for my words are those of a dying woman, and might carry some conviction to your heart. But here is Lady Cunliffe, and she can corroborate all I say, if you still have doubts."

"No, I have none. I believe you, Miss Wheeler, and thank you for your candour; but it is too late for anything now, except as regards Ruth."

He spoke the name he loved so well with lingering tenderness of accent, but was too oppressed and overcome to desire any continuance of the subject, when the good-natured little widow sailed down upon him and her protégée, in a sea-side costume

composed of many colours, and displaying itself brilliantly in the full light of the morning sunshine. The good lady's greetings were as cordial as if Mr. Beaumont were still the cherished visitor at The Bower, and her hopes for her niece still in the ascendant, instead of being all miserably crushed and dispersed. The fact was, in the pleasurable excitement of meeting an old acquaintance in such an unlikely place, Lady Cunliffe's heart warmed and melted at the sight, till nothing but pleasurable emotions remained. She assailed him with a perfect shower of delights and unexpected pleasures, and finished by cordially inviting him to come and dine with her at 'Carnation Cottage.' "

"Such a pretty name, isn't it, and quite a pretty place too—a little cottage *orné*; and you need not be afraid of venturing to dine with poor Sophy and me, for though she eats next to nothing, I have got my Le

Maître with me, to tempt her when I can."

Then, with many thanks, did Mr. Beaumont decline the hospitable invitation; he said he must be back on his friend's yacht at the turn of the tide; she stood some way out to sea, and if he did not go then, it would not be practicable later.

"Yes, I know all about your yacht—Sir Francis Hardy's, and it is called the *Nautilus*. Yes, I met some of her men up in the town just now, and I saw the name on their hats, and stopped to ask if they belonged to that fine cutter that had been lying out there these three days; and they were very civil, well-behaved men, and told me their master was gone down to shoot at Lord Daneland's; but they had got Mr. Beaumont on board, and expected Sir Francis back to-morrow; and they added they had just landed Mr. Beaumont, but were to fetch him off again when the tide turned, so I was not at all

surprised, only much pleased, when I found you talking to Sophy."

And so the lady ran on, but never a word was said by her in regard to the Maxwells; he felt that the subject was now tabooed, and he could neither expect to hear of nor to see Ruth at her aunt's house. It was plain also that Ruth purposely avoided him, and would no doubt confine herself strictly to the house, till she was satisfied that the *Nautilus* had sailed away, and that she should see him no more. One parting question he whispered as he shook hands with Sophy before they parted. It was,

"Does *she* know I am here?"

The reply was,

"You were talking to me last night, Mr. Beaumont, at the end of the pier."

That was enough; the avoidance was intentional. He should never see or speak to Ruth Maxwell again.

Under that persuasion he turned away

and walked sadly enough down the little pier. He was quite ready to depart; there was no longer anything of interest to detain him in that spot. Thus pre-occupied, it was a few moments before he was aware that Lady Cunliffe was pattering at his side. Louis thought he had taken leave of her at the same time as her companion. She forestalled any inquiry he might be about to make, by saying,

"I am just coming with you to the end of the jetty, Mr. Beaumont. I shall take Sophy in after that, but I wanted to ask you what is your opinion. How do you think she looks? You who have not seen her for so long are a much better judge than we who see her every day."

Louis turned and looked in Lady Cunliffe's face, and was struck and impressed by the expression of deep, anxious interest he saw there. It struck him with something akin to surprise that there should be anyone

found to feel so lively a concern in the fate of that disagreeable woman who, now despoiled of her only attraction, must be, he thought, a grievous burden on her kind patroness. He only said what he thought, that Miss Wheeler looked to him like a person in a deep decline.

"I feared it! I feared it! and have done so all along; though I did flatter myself she was better for coming here, poor girl—poor woman, rather—but all her father's family were consumptive; he died of it younger than Sophy. I fear there is nothing more to be done for her!"

"You seem to have done all that can be thought of," replied Louis, more in accordance with what she had just said than from any knowledge he himself possessed, or any great interest in the subject; and seeing how much she evidently felt, he added, "It must be an anxious charge for you. Has Miss Wheeler no friends to share it with you?"

"None. Poor Sophy is quite alone in the world; but she has been so long with me that I quite look upon her as a relation, or as an adopted child, especially since this sad illness has made her so helpless. I am very thankful to have her with me, and now I am so much happier about her. I mean, as to the state of her mind. She is quite changed, Mr. Beaumont. My niece has been a valuable friend to Sophy; but she has found a better one still since we came here. There is such a dear, good clergyman, and Sophy likes him so much that she will listen to anything he says. She went, when she was able, to his church when we first came, because Mr. Morton is a High Churchman, and the music is so fine. Sophy went entirely, I believe, on that account at first. Mrs. Morton is a splendid musician, almost as good as poor Sophy herself, so they soon struck up an acquaintance, for seeing she was such an invalid, Mr. Morton

and his wife called on us immediately; and a happy acquaintance it has proved for us all. I can never be sufficiently thankful that I persuaded her to come."

They had by that time reached the end of the pier, and Louis was looking out for his boat. He did not, however feel at all impatient of Lady Cunliffe, and her kindly joys and sorrows; on the contrary, as he looked into her round, plump face, beaming with all good feelings, he was moved to say,

"Forgive me, Lady Cunliffe, for touching on a very painful family subject, but you mentioned your niece just now, and I cannot help expressing my deep regret that neither she (as I am led to believe) nor I was made aware of what everyone else about us knew—the connection between our respective families."

Lady Cunliffe's round face flushed a little, but she answered, steadily,

"I do not think, Mr. Beaumont, you have

anyone to blame on that account. It was a very delicate family subject; and allow me to say that as you yourself had chosen to ignore the existence of—any of the Maxwell family, it would have been an act of impertinence for any common friend or acquaintance to have forced the subject upon your consideration. There was no deception used. You knew my niece for what she was. It was your own fault that you had remained in ignorance of the tie that bound her to her step-mother."

"I never knew that Dr. Maxwell had been previously married," replied Louis.

Lady Cunliffe only inclined her gaily-decked head a little stiffly, as much as to say, "But you might easily have done so, had you not chosen to cut the whole connection—your own mother included."

Mr. Beaumont felt actually rebuked by the silence of the friendly little woman, and a wish to exculpate himself, even to retrieve,

if possible, the past, came over him, and his voice faltered as he said,

"It is too late, Lady Cunliffe, to talk of the past. No doubt there were errors on all sides—pride and prejudice, perhaps, on one, and—well, a certain amount of weakness and folly on the other. But I have no wish now to sit in judgment on my—on Mrs. Maxwell's conduct in forsaking her children and marrying her—her medical man."

"As good a man as ever lived, and as good-looking, I have been told, and clever as he was handsome. I have a right to speak, Mr. Beaumont, for he was my own dear sister Mary's husband, and the father of Ruth!"

The father of Ruth! That remark told home. Could the father of such a woman have been anything but what was desirable? Was it any wonder that, if he had been as charming and fascinating as a man as his daughter was as a woman, even *his*

mother had been brought to love him? Louis felt conviction stealing over him, and, for the first time in his life, thought that his mother might have been less to blame than he had ever before considered her. As he pondered these things, Lady Cunliffe, perhaps detecting something like a softening in the expression of his eyes, said, very softly,

"Mrs. Maxwell never intended to forsake her children—she loved them all too dearly! —but they were taken from her, poor woman!"

"Then why has she never spoken all this long time?—I mean, since she became a widow."

"That is not so very long ago. But she loved her husband too dearly, and lamented him too sincerely, to advance any claims of her own, because of his removal. No, my dear sir, the children who have so long rejected their mother must come forward

themselves and claim her. She can never go to them and ask for their affection, badly enough as she may want it."

Poor Lady Cunliffe pleaded almost unconsciously for Ruth's dearly-loved stepmother, till the tears stood in her good, honest eyes, and rolled down her plump, kind face. Mr. Beaumont was naturally extremely reserved, like his father, and he had the greatest horror and dread of a scene, so he looked almost with alarm on such signs of emotion, resolutely, on his own part, repressing every treacherous indication of yielding or weakness. Whatever he might hereafter do or resolve, it should be the work of his own deliberate conviction, and not of any romantic sentiment called forth by the pleading of another. One thought, however, suddenly struck him, that had never occurred before—it was in regard to his mother's circumstances. She might have been left ill-provided for, even in want; and

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it consistent in me to ask the question, b
yet I think I may be excused for doing s
and that is, can you tell me whether M
Maxwell's circumstances are—such as—
I mean, plainly, has she enough to live co
fortably upon—of her own, I mean?"

Lady Cunliffe looked as if she felt it wa
question in which she had no right to medd
and Mrs. Maxwell had never talked of h
pecuniary affairs to the kind lady, nor h
Ruth ever hinted how far her step-moth
was dependent upon her generosity for eve
comfort as well as luxury she enjoyed. S
therefore only said,

"I know very little about Mrs. Maxwel

affairs. My niece is in possession of a comfortable independence, but which necessitates her continual residence in Castleford, which was the reason of their coming to settle there; but how much belongs to one or the other, I cannot tell you. They seem to me like the good Christians in early days, and have all things in common, and, I should say, are very well off."

"Then you really think my mother" (he said the word boldly at last) "wants nothing from me—or I would gladly give it?"

"Nothing but your love; and, oh! my dear sir, if you will but give her that!"

"That is easier said than done," said Mr. Beaumont, trying to turn off the appeal lightly, and holding out his hand, which Lady Cunliffe took, and held for a moment affectionately between her own, saying,

"Then good-bye, dear Mr. Beaumont, and I wish you all happiness in the new state of life into which you are about to

enter. But pray forgive me if I remind you that a man may have many wives (not that I hope you may), but he can have but one mother; and to honour one's father and mother is the first commandment with a promise to it, and the better son the better husband, I think."

"Thank you for all your good wishes and intentions in regard to me, dear Lady Cunliffe, and I fully appreciate their kindness; but allow me to say one word on my own behalf, and that is, that the honour or respect due to parents, as you repeat it, must in some, or great measure, depend on the parents' just claim to such a sentiment from their children. I have already expressed my willingness to give anything in my power to bestow."

Lady Cunliffe made no answer. What more could she say? She felt as if she had failed in her endeavour, and with one more wistful look in the young man's face, and a

farewell friendly pressure to the hands she held, dropped them, and turned on her way, leaving Louis to pursue his.

He hastened to take his place in the boat that waited for him, observing, as he did so, that the skipper was absent; and as he had landed with him that morning, he made inquiry whether they were to wait his return from the town. The answer was, that a messenger from Danelands had come for him with a note from Sir Francis, desiring him to join him there as soon as possible, as he had several directions he wished to give him in person. One of the men also explained to Mr. Beaumont that a large party were coming the next day, after the ball, to lunch on board the yacht, and that Sir Francis was very particular in his orders that everything should be in the best possible order; and Mr. Tilney (the captain of the yacht) was gone to Danelands to receive all Sir Francis's orders about the

luncheon, as he could not spare his own man, and he was to convey them to the cook on board.

"But he wanted Mr. Tilney particular," said the man, "as there was such a large party coming, and Sir Francis wanted everything on board to be 'ship-shape.'"

"And then I suppose Sir Francis means to remain on board after the party leave, and sail to-morrow?" asked Louis.

"No doubt he do, sir," was the man's answer.

CHAPTER XII.

SUCH were the orders and directions in anticipation of a morrow that never came for many on board that vessel. The night that followed Louis Beaumont's return was a remarkable one in many ways, and long remembered at that little out-of-the-way sea place.

There were great doings on land within a few miles distant, at Danelands, where the heir of that ancient house came of age, and the event was to be celebrated by a grand ball and other festivities. It was a Providential hand, perhaps, that singled out the owner of the yacht, and kept him on land that night, and with him was also the cap-

tain of that doomed vessel. Who would have believed, as they gazed upon her in her quiet beauty that evening, that her course was so nearly run? The day had been calm and misty, but rather too warm, perhaps, to be seasonable at that time of the year. Louis had not been long returned on board, in a very uncomfortable frame of mind, induced by all he had seen and heard during his short absence, when he observed a sudden change in the atmosphere. Black clouds gathered rapidly, and the sun went down (or appeared to do so) in a bed of stormy, tempestuous-looking vapour. After that the wind rose, and before twelve o'clock came on to blow a perfect hurricane. All hands on board did their best, but the master-hand was wanting, and some confusion prevailed. The order had been sent to bring the yacht nearer to land, on account of shortening the passage in the boats the next day for

some of the expected lady-guests who were bad sailors. Whilst these orders were being obeyed in the best manner possible, and a fresh anchorage about to be taken, a sudden squall arose which entirely defeated the good intentions, and rendered the anchor useless. It was therefore dragged along, and though no danger was at first apprehended, the increasing fury of the wind and storm began to render the beautiful vessel rather unmanageable in the hands of those in whose care it was now left, and a few hours later the *Nautilus* was being driven furiously by the south-west wind full on to the shore.

That sudden and most unexpected gale took most of the dwellers on the sea-shore by surprise that night. As the storm increased in fury, it was accompanied by a blinding rain, with peals of thunder and vivid flashes of lightning, which gave occasional glimpses of the wild work going on

upon the ocean and all things on it. Two or three colliers had broken away from their moorings, and, dragging their anchors after them, were rushing madly on to their destruction.

Then crowds began to assemble on the shore, and the beachmen (that gallant set of men) were running their boats along in the vain hope of being able to launch them in that boiling cauldron of foaming waves. The shouting was deafening; the doomed vessels seemed so near, and yet there was a gulf that none could pass, though many dared it. People on the shore tried to hail those on board, and the sailors there vainly endeavoured to make themselves heard.

Mrs. Maxwell and Ruth were sitting in their room, which was on the ground-floor and opened into a little garden, the low wall only dividing it from the beach. No one had told Mrs. Maxwell of her son's sudden and unexpected appearance,

either on that or the preceding day. It had been found advisable to keep her as calm and little excited by painful subjects as possible. Had she known he had been so near, there had been no rest or repose for her during the time that the *Nautilus* remained visible. To Ruth, who knew all, that evening's scene was one of terrible trial —not that she was at first aware that his vessel was in danger, but she heard the cries of many who were, and the despairing shouts of those on shore who tried in vain to help them.

"What a fearful night!" said unconscious Mrs. Maxwell, walking to the window and drawing back the curtain, "and how dark it is now! Who would have dreamt that such a calm, lovely morning would have had such a stormy night to follow! Hark! what is that noise I hear?"

"Guns, mother—some ship further off. How dark it is!—cannot we help them by

throwing some little light on the scene?"

Then Ruth and her mother drew back every blind and curtain in the house that looked towards the sea, and lighted all the candles, for gas, unfortunately, had been too late an invention for that primitive little place. However, they got up a very respectable illumination, which was reflected even on to the verge of the angry sea. Then Ruth leant out of the window, regardless of the wind and rain which beat in her face, and tried to pierce the deep darkness without. There were torches moving about on the beach close under their window, and she saw men trying to throw the rocket over a large vessel which pitched and rolled tremendously quite within sight. Then a loud shout announced she had run to ground, and the fury of the waves was such that all thought it was impossible she could long hold together. As Ruth, with speechless fear, looked on, not daring to

speak, dreading, yet hoping, and praying from her inmost heart for "those in peril on the sea," the door opened suddenly, and, to the surprise of both Mrs. Maxwell and Ruth, Lady Cunliffe came in.

"I could not rest—I could not rest at home! I have sent Sophy to bed, and my man is gone to hear all he can down there. Oh! Ruth, how terrible this is! Why does not your mother go to bed?"

"For the same reason, my dear Lady Cunliffe," said Mrs. Maxwell, with a half-smile, "that you are up—I cannot rest. Who could on such a night as this?"

"Well, I hope poor Sophy is asleep by this time. You know her room is to the back." Then, turning her attention again to Ruth, she said, "It is very terrible for these ships close to the shore, but there is little danger, I believe, for large ones lying out in the open sea."

That was meant to be privately re-assuring

to Ruth, and was so understood by her as referring to the *Nautilus*. Little did either of them think that that splendid vessel was now lying not many yards from the shore, and yet all helplessly cut off from human help! Soon after, whilst they stood at the window watching the vain efforts to throw the rocket, which was so often helplessly beat on one side by the force of the wind, Lady Cunliffe's servant came breathlessly into the room.

"Oh! my lady, sad news! Yon's the ship that Mr. Beaumont went sailing in this morning. It has broke away from its anchor, and run aground, and is being beat to pieces by the waves and the wind!"

Poor Mrs. Maxwell!—did she hear aright? With ghastly face and starting eyes, she seized Ruth's hand, whispering,

"Tell me all!—do not be afraid! I will be very quiet, and give no trouble! But is it my son?"

A few hurried words seemed to put Mrs. Maxwell in possession of the few facts respecting his being in that wrecked vessel; and she nerved herself to hear all, for might not she be able to help him still, poor weak mother? She hardly thought how frail and incapable she was of coping with that terrible ocean; and yet it was threatening to swallow her first-born, and she felt strong in her faith to resist it.

Soon after, on the beach amongst the crowd, and in the full glare of the torches, stood two delicate-looking women—one apparently the mother of the other, and though fragile as a leaf before the wind, yet steadily pressing on and encouraging the brave men who were prepared to risk life and limb in the service of their fellow-creatures. But the life-boats could not be launched in that angry sea, and the rockets could not reach their destination, sent so far off their mark by that wild wind; and then it was hoarsely

murmured amongst the crowd that the gallant ship was breaking up. Three times did the life-boat with her brave crew try to head the tremendous surf that rolled in with such force, and so many times was the boat capsized, and the men struggling for their lives, but they happily escaped. And numberless were the efforts made by others to shoot the rocket so as to near the sinking ship. All seemed vain—there appeared to be a fate against her, and that she was doomed to destruction.

The agony of those on shore was intense! —so near, and yet to see the unfortunate crew perish within sight—almost within speaking distance! Never had a wilder night been known even in mid-Winter. The men on board were seen clinging to the masts and falling spars; then there rose a shout that the ship's back was broken, and the beautiful yacht parted mid-stays, and gradually seemed to be torn piece by piece away.

"Throw the rope!—send it near!—there may be a chance yet!" whispered a hollow, supplicating voice at the elbow of the officer who was beginning to desist from his fruitless endeavours to save the crew by means of the rocket.

He turned and looked, and saw a pale, agonized-looking woman, all drenched with rain, and clutching in her trembling hands a great coil of rope, one end of which she held appealingly up to him. He could not resist taking it in his own, and saying, "I will do my best, madam." For the voice and the action were those of a lady, and he seemed to feel she had more than a common interest in the awful spectacle that was then before their eyes. He saw by the torchlight that the woman who spoke had long passed her youth, but close beside her, with resolute face and pale, beautiful features, stood another, in all the pride and majesty of her Summer life-time. They both clung together, the

younger supporting the elder, and yet the elder in some measure guiding and directing the younger; but the man never forgot, as the light flashed full in their fear-stricken faces, the depth of anguish he read there as the shout rose, "They are about to swim for their lives! God help them!"

"Send them a rope and save them, I beseech you!" pleaded the pale woman at his side.

"I will give directions, madam; but I must tell you there is little chance in such a sea as this—no man can stem such a tide as rolls from the shore to-night."

"Oh! yes, there is hope. Only shoot the rope, and we, my daughter and I, will hold it, and draw him in."

The man only answered the wild appeal by a glance of pity. Still ropes were sent out in the direction of the doomed vessel. It was then declared that one man, clinging to the falling mast, had seized it; that he

had tied himself to it, and leaped into the boiling, raging water. There was occasionally to be discerned a head struggling with the waves; often and often did it disappear, and at last was seen no more. Experienced hands were at work to bring that rope with its burden to land. Poor Mrs. Maxwell still insisted on holding by one end; but, though she was indulged in her wild delusion, what help there was came from other and more efficient quarters.

"We cannot tell that it is *he*," whispered Ruth to her step-mother.

"I know it is," she answered calmly.

"A life may yet be saved; but where are the others?" said Ruth.

A man close by, who was engaged in hauling in the rope, answered,

"There are a cluster of them; I saw them by the last flash; they are all clinging to the bowsprit. If they can hold on for a time there may be hope yet."

"Yes," observed a comrade, "better hope than for this poor fellow we are hauling in."

A few minutes later a drowned man lay prone and helpless on the beach, drenched to death, apparently, by the surging waves that had passed over him. He had been drawn in like a piece of wreck by the rope to which he had fastened himself. The crowd pressed round. The body was raised and the face turned to meet the gaze of all beholders. They gave way instinctively to the two women who had so vainly helped to rescue him. The elder of the two knelt down by the drowned man's side. She motioned to the torch-bearers to draw near. They came and compassionately held their lights to reflect strongly on the face of the corpse.

"It *is* he," said the kneeling woman, looking up in the face of the younger, who was bending over her, and who answered,

"Is there no life left?"

"I cannot tell; it may only be suspended," returned the mother quite calmly, and raising the drooping head upon her knee.

Then came officious but kind hands round on all sides with offers of help, and suggestions of what was best to be done.

"Where shall we carry the gentleman?" asked two or three voices, as the owners prepared to carry the body, which lay still upon the sand, the death-like head still on the mother's lap. She made way for them to lift and carry the precious burden, still retaining her hold of the powerless head, and saying,

"Carry him into my house close by. I am his mother. I will show you how to hold him."

All her wild excitement was gone. In the desperate but still fluctuating hope of saving him, Mrs. Maxwell controlled every weakness, and resolutely nerved herself to superintend and carry out all that medical skill

or watchful care could do to save, if possible, or re-animate one flickering spark of life. Thus she accompanied the men to her house, her son's head still resting on her shoulder, where she had instructed them to place it.

"For," said she, "all depends on the position in which it is held."

No one, to see and hear her then, could have believed how frail, how weak she was. On went the mournful procession to the house they had lately quitted, and on the threshold they were met by Lady Cunliffe and a medical man whose aid she had called in, in case of such a contingency as had now occurred. Mrs. Maxwell grasped the friendly hand as she went by, murmuring, "The winds and the waves and God's great mercy have given me back my son, and He will restore him to life."

Then to the bearers she gave calm orders to carry her son upstairs into her own room and lay him on the bed there.

Long hours passed by. Mrs. Maxwell, the medical man, and a few necessary attendants, alone were admitted to that chamber where the great battle of life and death was raging—where a faint returning spark of life was being nursed with agonizing care, and where the prayer of faith went up with unremitting constancy. Once Mrs. Maxwell went down into the sitting-room, where Ruth sat with closed eyes and clasped hands, beside her aunt, who, having done all she could, was now peacefully slumbering on the uncomfortable little sofa where she had placed herself to "watch and listen;" but sleep had surprised her, and there she lay when Mrs. Maxwell came in. One glance was sufficient in that direction, but she placed her cold, trembling hand on Ruth's shoulder, and the girl started and looked up, for she had not heard the mother's light footstep. Mrs. Maxwell did not speak for a moment, as Ruth's agitated inquiring look

met her own, and then in answer only said,

"He lives!—the spark is not quite extinct, but it may be any moment. The hand of man is doing all it can; but pray, pray, Ruth! Oh! pray, as you never yet prayed, that he may be spared—if not to us, at least for others!"

Mrs. Maxwell pressed one long loving kiss on Ruth's brow, and gazed entreatingly into her sweet eyes, as Ruth answered,

"Yes, mother dear—I have never ceased to pray for one moment; and I have faith that we shall be heard and our prayers answered."

And then the mother glided quickly and noiselessly out of the room and back again into a small room opening into her own, where the great battle was still going on.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE day before that eventful one, Miss Beaumont returned home—at least to her temporary one at Rhys Castle. She found Gwendoline alone with Mrs. Nelson, and heard that Miss Winyard had left the preceding one.

"I expected to have found Madeline here," said Maude, on being told of her departure.

"No," replied Gwendoline; "Madeline thought it would be better to leave us alone, as she said, to settle all our worldly affairs, and as she does not know Louis, she fancied she might be in the way."

Maude fancied Gwendoline looked a little sorrowful as she said this; and as the day

went on, felt sure that she missed Miss Winyard even more than she acknowledged; and then Maude observed,

"It is a pity Madeline did not wait to make Louis's acquaintance. I am sure they would have been pleased with each other."

"To a certain extent," answered Gwendoline, cautiously. "But I do not think their objects in life are the same, so there may not be much congeniality between the two."

Maude laughed.

"I hope Madeline has not bitten you with any of her strange fancies, Gwendoline; though I daresay you would take the infection favourably."

Gwendoline coloured, and answered,

"I hope you will think favourably yourself of all my fancies, as you call them, that I have been able to carry out under Madeline's advice and co-operation. You know Louis gave me *carte blanche* to do as I thought best here."

"No doubt he did, my dear little coz, as very right and proper a man should when a woman has a place of her own to perform in."

Gwendoline did not look quite satisfied, but she waited till the proper time, hoping to impress Maude more favourably with some of these performances. But when the time arrived, Maude was rather surprised at the magnitude of the works undertaken, and the multitude of people who were concerned in their accomplishment.

"I hope," said Gwendoline that afternoon, "that you will not mind dining at four, Maude. We have to start from this house soon after five for the afternoon services at the 'Sister's Home,' and I have various things to settle with the ladies at the 'Refuge,' and Friday, you must know, is my visiting day. I am not always quite so early, and when we get the chapel finished, and Mr. Cyprian Winyard fully ordained,

and installed as resident Chaplain, when Louis comes to live here, it will be easier for you. I fear you do not like the idea of it, Maude, but you need not come."

Miss Beaumont did indeed look a little aghast, but she was very good-natured and sensible in some things, so she refrained from any special remonstrance, and prepared to accompany Gwendoline on her new tour of duties. She was rather longing to tell her of all that had befallen her since they parted, but no opening occurred. It being Friday, Gwendoline seemed inclined to confine all her conversation to a certain range of subjects, with which Maude was at that time not at all familiar.

"This is all very new," she remarked to Mrs. Nelson, as she met that lady in the hall, hurrying down at the sound of the four o'clock dinner-bell.

Mrs. Nelson made a dismal face, and shook her head ominously, then observed,

as she walked on, "Yes, poor child, she has been quite taken out of her own hands. Miss Winyard settles everything here, and I don't like that Mr. Cyprian at all."

"Her brother, I suppose?" asked Maude; "does he come here much?"

"Not here exactly; but they are always meeting at the Refuges and Sisterhoods, and other places, which he has taken under his pastoral care, as they call it. You will see him to-night."

Maude was struck with an indefinable alteration she discerned in Gwendoline. She was kind and amiable as ever—it was not in her nature to be otherwise; but there was something like restraint in their intercourse, as if she feared doing or saying anything that might be wrong, or not strictly in accordance with a certain set of ideas and principles newly adopted. Maude tried to lead the converstion after dinner, when the servants had withdrawn, to the subject she

believed most interesting to Gwendoline; that was, the expected return of Louis. She said,

"You see I came at once, Gwendoline, when I got Louis's letter to say he was on his way home, and might be expected any day."

Gwendoline answered simply,

"I am very glad to see you, Maude; it seems a long time since you were here."

"Yes, I have been playing the truant rather, and so has Louis for the matter of that; but you know, Gwen dear, he was not quite his own master, and, I daresay, could not manage to get back sooner."

Gwendoline coloured a little as she answered,

"I am glad he has been so well amused, and also am not sorry, on my own account, that his prolonged absence has enabled me to carry out much that might otherwise never have been perfected."

"Oh, Gwen! you will have plenty of time after you are married to carry out things as you talk of; you need not be in such a hurry, as if your marriage were to put a stopper on all your good works."

"I hope not indeed," answered Gwendoline, rather shortly, as if to cut the subject short. And then Maude asked,

"Do you expect Louis to-day?"

"Oh! no, nor to-morrow either. I think he cannot possibly reach Plymouth this day or two, as he is delayed at some little seaside place, he tells me."

"I hope he will like all your works; you seem to have been very busy, Gwen."

"I have endeavoured to make the most of my time, Maude, having wasted so much of it before; but in respect to Louis's approval, I take that for granted, after all he has said, and should, at any rate, consider myself bound to go on as I have begun."

Then Gwendoline rose from the table, and

the three ladies walked into the drawing-room; but Gwendoline soon left them, to prepare in various ways for her visits and evening performances of various kinds.

"What is this large house," asked Maude, as they drove up to a desolate-looking building, half finished and very uncomfortable in appearance.

"Oh, you must not judge of it by what you see now; it is all in progress, and I had hoped would have been completed before Louis's return."

"Then, after all, it seems you could have spared him a little longer, Gwen."

There was a little pique in Maude's voice, and absorbed as Gwendoline's soul was in her new crotchets, she immediately perceived it, and answered with her usual sweetness of voice and manner,

"You must not think that, dear Maude, it is only the good of others and not my own pleasure that I was thinking of. Dear Louis!

you know very well he will be only too welcome when he comes."

"I am glad of that," said Maude shortly; then looking about she said, "I am sure I remember this place, only some strange alteration has taken place—some metamorphose which I do not perfectly realise. Surely, Gwen, you have not pulled down the old 'Bard' public-house?"

"Not entirely, Maude; but you are quite correct in your recollections—it still stands behind this new pile of building. I paid a good sum to get the old landlord to go out, which he did, grumbling very much; but Madeline advised me not to allow of any public-house on my estate. I am sorry to say she cannot prevail upon General Winyard to see the thing as we do, but I have got rid of all mine."

This was said with a slight accent of self-applause, which Maude answered by saying,

"I think the General is right; if they are

well conducted I do not see any harm in them, and they are a great convenience, especially in this part of the world, where there are so many tourists."

"Oh, I assure you, Maude, we are not forgetful of the rights of hospitality; and we are going to set apart a guest-chamber in this very building, on the monastic plan, where travellers will be taken in and entertained without their having to pay anything."

"I had rather pay for my entertainment," answered Maude; and then added, "Well, and what have you done with your old picturesque inn?"

"Oh, it is all there at the back of this building, and the ladies lodge there now. This is not sufficiently finished to give sleeping accommodation; but we have got the great hall in such a state of forwardness that we can assemble together, as we are about to do at this very time. Come, Maude, will you get out and look in at us for half an hour?"

Miss Beaumont descended, and followed Gwendoline with a strange sensation of unreality in all that was occurring, half expecting to awake and find that she had been dreaming. However the dream continued, and she went on. The first thing she observed was a large hall, with a double row of windows, and a large dreary-looking fireplace without fire at the end. There was a large square table on one side, and a few chairs placed round, one of which appeared to be slightly raised, and on a kind of platform. The whole side of the opposite part of the room was occupied by a long table, where apparently the inmates of the house took their meals, or pursued their various employments, a row of chairs being placed on either side. A few ladies occupied these chairs, and some of them were talking together when Gwendoline and Maude entered. There was an immediate hush, and subsequent flocking round Miss Powys as she walked up

the room. Maude was at once introduced as "my cousin, Miss Beaumont;" and the five or six ladies severally named in turn to Maude. Then Gwendoline looked towards the raised seat, and said to the nearest lady, "Not come yet, Miss Osborne?"

"No; the Father is late this evening; it is not his custom to be so dilatory."

Then another lady, designated as Mrs. Browne, declared she heard the sound of wheels, and her neighbour, Miss Wallace, thought she was mistaken; but a lady in widow's weeds corroborated the first lady's statement, and a few moments after the expected gentleman made his appearance. Not the gentleman only, but a lady was with him, whom Maude immediately recognised and addressed as Miss Winyard. She returned Maude's welcome very graciously, observing, with a smile,

"I am Mother Madeline here, and I must introduce you to my brother, Father Cyprian."

There could have been little doubt as to the relationship between the two, and Maude thought she had never seen a finer, handsomer man than this member of the Winyard family. His dark chestnut hair was combed entirely back from his grave, thoughtful brow; and his features were peculiarly fine, though the cast of his countenance was almost severe in its pale beauty. He wore the long, dark, close-fitting garments of the High Church, and seemed to wish to assimilate the cut and fashion of them as much as possible to that of the priestly persuasion from which he borrowed his designation. He was singularly tall, but moved with such unstudied ease that he never appeared awkward, even when far out-topping his fellow-men.

As he took his place (after a brief recognition of Miss Powys and her cousin) upon the raised platform, a general hush prevailed, and the lecture commenced. Father Cyprian never "preached" at that time—

he only "lectured." He was gifted with great eloquence and a persuasive though somewhat dictatorial style of delivery. Gwendoline occupied the nearest seat to the lecturer. Madeline and Maude took places near. On the opposite side sat all the ladies of the household. There was a murmur of admiration when the lecture came to an end, and then Gwendoline, addressing herself to the eldest matron present, said,

"I daresay, Mrs. Browne, you will give us a little tea, for we mean to visit the sisters, and are rather pressed for time this evening."

The tea was soon after brought in, and bore testimony to the comfortable domestic arrangements of the house, although the exterior was at that time so unprepossessing. Maude could not resist a feeling of jealous apprehension in regard to that handsome young man (priest though he professed himself to be) on her brother's behalf.

There was nothing, however, to be detected but the most distant civility between him and Gwendoline.

Miss Winyard seemed the directing spirit of the establishment, and under the cognomen of "Mother," to exercise her maternal privileges pretty widely. She and Gwendoline talked a good deal apart, after tea was over; and then Maude addressed herself to Cyprian Winyard, and asked him such trifling questions as she would have put to any other young man with whom she might have been thrown for half an hour's conversation or amusement. His answers were perfectly courteous, and his manner attentive, though reserved; but there was a something in it which convinced Maude that he looked upon her as a frivolous, butterfly sort of being—a something to be endured by the wiser and better portion of mankind; nor did he appear in the least impressed by her beauty or charm of manner.

He even appeared to listen to old Mrs. Browne with more suavity and apparent satisfaction.

"I shall look in at the Sisters," said he to Gwendoline, as she and Maude were preparing to go there. "I have promised to attend to a case of conscience there—you are probably acquainted with it?—but I cannot stay long. I have to meet a friend a few miles from here this evening; he is to preach at W——, and I am desirous of profiting by his discourse."

Gwendoline looked up at her new tall friend with grateful admiration, and all the ladies joined in a chorus of praise, even before he had quite disappeared.

The visit to the Sisterhood was of a rather different character, but altogether of so singular a nature in Maude's experience that, as soon as they returned to the Castle, about nine o'clock, she threw herself into an easy-chair, and told Gwendoline plainly she "wondered at her."

"I daresay you do, Maude; and I do not wonder at that. Of course I am prepared for blame, or misunderstanding, even from my best friends."

"No; it is not that, my dear child. Only I think you have embarked in such big enterprises that you will soon be quite overwhelmed in the work of your own hands. My wonder is that you have contrived to collect together such a lot of unfortunates in a few months, of whose existence you were quite ignorant before. It does seem such a strange, Quixotic undertaking, you three young people setting your heads together to do all this of your own accord. It appears to me—forgive me, Gwen—but that Miss Winyard and her brother are airing all their various fantasies at your expense."

"Ah! you don't—you cannot understand us, Maude."

"But do you think that Louis will?"

"I hope so. I can hardly think he can

be so unreasonable as to object to refuges for the destitute, and sisterhoods where every virtue is taught and practised."

"I do not object to these things, Gwen, dear, properly conducted; but it seems so strange to me, you and the Winyards rushing into it all, without a word of warning or advice from older and more experienced heads."

"Ah! that is just it, Maude. Madeline wishes to correct many errors she has observed in similar establishments, so we prefer acting entirely on our own responsibility."

"What does Mr. Lloyd say to it all?" asked Maude.

"Well, I am sorry to say he has acted a very unfriendly part, and opposed everything I have done. I hear he means to resign his situation here soon, but will not do so till Louis comes home. He says my 'Refuge' is a refuge for idleness, and encouragement for people to trust to anything

rather than their own exertions, and he says everything that is unpleasant, especially of my Sisterhood."

"What is the difference between the two?" asked Maude. "Would not the same building contain both?"

"I think not," answered Gwendoline, pondering. "At least Madeline said the inmates had better be kept apart. The people at the Refuge are only waiting for employment, whilst those at the Sisterhood are permanently settled for life, if they like to stay."

"And who supports them?"

"I do, for the most part, I am thankful to say, though the Sisterhood is partly self-supporting. Madeline contributes her most active assistance, and her brother, as you see, lends his aid in the most efficacious way. We are working well, I do hope."

But Maude whispered, "Too well to last!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"ANY letter from Louis this morning?" asked Maude, as the contents of the post-bag were being distributed the next morning, and she received her own share, reserving one peculiar letter for her more private perusal afterwards.

"No," answered Gwendoline, rather carelessly. "I told you I did not expect him quite so soon. I think he will be here Monday or Tuesday."

"And then are you ready to go to London, as was proposed, for a week, before the wedding takes place?"

Gwendoline looked rather thoughtful, and made answer,

"Do you know, Maude, I should like to

cut that London expedition altogether. I hope Louis will not be vexed, but really I think so very differently from what I did on the subject of ornaments, and trinkets of all sorts and kinds, that it would give me no pleasure to go there on that account, and I wish Louis would bestow the money elsewhere. I am sure I shall spend none of my own in that way; and I daresay you don't care to go just now. So, if you please, we will tell him, when he comes, that we don't want to go to London at present."

Maude flushed a little, for she had dwelt much upon that expected visit. It had been arranged between her and John Penrose that he should meet her there, and they were to make all arrangements for their marriage at the same time in London—for it need hardly be said he was now her accepted lover. She looked up at Gwendoline's fair, placid face, and said,

"That arrangement may suit you very

well, Gwen, but it does not suit me, because I also am going to be married, and have several things to settle and get for myself."

Gwendoline started up.

"Why, Maude, dearest, how came you to leave me in the dark all this time, and never tell me one word? I fear you must suppose me so selfishly engrossed that I can think of nothing and no one but myself."

"On the contrary, Gwendoline, I think you are just now a great deal too busy about everybody but yourself, and that is the reason I could not tell you before—you had no time to listen to me. Well, I won't keep you in suspense. I have been staying in the same house with John Penrose at the Vaughans', and he has asked me to marry him, and I have consented. Not much of a love-story, is it?"

"I am so surprised, Maude! You said yesterday you wondered at me. Now to-day I wonder at you."

"I suppose you thought I should prefer the Abbey, and all its encumbrances; but I did not—on the same principle, I suppose, that you have renounced jewels and fine things altogether."

"Well, yours is by no means a worldly choice," said Gwendoline, meditating.

"I don't know—I have chosen the man I prefer to all others in the world, so I don't claim any particular merit; and as to the Brewery, he is going to say good-bye to it, as I have a very worldly sort of objection to it; but he will remain in the Bank, so you see I have not encouraged him to be idle altogether."

"Then you will live, I suppose, in Castleford?" asked Gwendoline, doubtfully.

Maude made a little grimace, but said quietly,

"No, you must come a little farther to call upon me. Do you remember a pretty place called Waterfells, about ten miles from

Castleford, where an old bachelor friend of my uncle's (your father) lived years ago; and once when we were children (you were very young, Gwen), we were taken there to spend the day. What a day of delight it was!—grass terraces rising one above another, gardens full of fruit, which we were allowed to pick without let or hindrance, and charming old-fashioned fish-ponds, with little boats, in which we were rowed; and such a delightful old house! I have seen it once since. But I daresay you remember the bright day at Waterfells?"

"I think I do," returned Gwendoline, doubtfully—"at least, I remember going there."

"Well, John has settled to buy the dear old place. It is not an over-grand or great one, like Harewood, or this old Castle, but big enough for John and me to live very happily in. Oh! Gwen, I do think we shall be very happy!"

"I hope and trust you will," said Gwendoline, with all her kind little heart. She was much pleased to see Maude look so perfectly happy, and the thought of that took the place of all other considerations that day, and entirely superseded the "Refuge;" and even threw Madeline and Cyprian Winyard into the distance.

"I hope we are to dine at a civilized hour to-day, Gwen. Four o'clock does not suit me—it is neither one thing nor the other. Pray let it be nine o'clock instead, if you are going about again this evening."

"No, dear, I won't inflict that upon you every evening. It is the usual time to-day—half-past seven. What a strangely warm day for the middle of September," said Gwendoline.

"Yes—I am sure we are going to have a tempest—I feel thunder in the air—it is stifling," said Maude, throwing open the low window, and stepping out on to the grass-plot.

She and Gwendoline wandered about, and talked again like old times; and Madeline would have said that their frivolous talk was all the consequence of Maude's mundane frame of mind. Since she had taken Gwendoline so entirely into her own hands, and found her so malleable to her touch, Miss Winyard had become far more exacting and rigid—she was almost surprised at what she had already accomplished; and her ambition rose to heights she had never dreamed of when they seemed quite out of her reach. She looked upon Gwendoline's approaching marriage as the most untoward and unfortunate circumstance, her only hope being that Mr. Beaumont would continue to allow his wife the same latitude after marriage as he had done before, and that, if he did not enter into Gwendoline's new pursuits, he would enable her to continue them; and then, if everything was in a certain state of forwardness, that she might be

entrusted to carry on everything at Rhys during the absence of the lady of the place. It was her great delight to be considered as the Mother or Lady Superior of the two institutions which owed their origin to her incessant importunity and exertions.

That her favourite brother should act with her, and assist her by his valuable help, was a great object with her, and its accomplishment added not a little to the satisfaction with which she looked upon the accomplishment of her pet plans. No doubt she liked Gwendoline very much—nearly as much as having her own way and undisputed sway in all things. She looked upon Miss Powys, too, with that complacency with which persons of her stamp regard those whom they contrive entirely to lead and govern.

Gwendoline was hardly aware how much she was under the control of Miss Winyard, and honestly believed she was only acting

according. to her new convictions, and no doubt found a certain degree of sweetness and satisfaction in the exercise of such unlimited power as she found placed in her hands. Did the question ever arise in her mind as to how she might feel if called upon to relinquish it at her marriage, and be more under her husband's control? If Gwendoline never considered this seriously, Maude did. She had already begun speculating on the future which awaited her brother, when these new predilections on the part of Gwendoline became patent to his observation. The day, however, passed over happily to the two cousins. Gwendoline seemed inclined to relax something of her domestic discipline, in compliment to Maude's prejudices, which her open protest of the day before had made but too apparent. Gwendoline satisfied her conscience and her friendship by promising herself a week of more active employment than ever,

and that it should be pursued in the face of any remonstrances that Louis might see fit to urge, should he not approve entirely of all her proceedings. And this she took care to endorse more strongly by writing a long letter to Madeline, in which she poured out all her soul, and every conflicting sentiment in it, with perfect unreserve.

"She will, I daresay, read some of that to Cyprian," thought Gwendoline, "and he will send his advice as to how I ought to act in regard to Louis. Dear Louis! I only hope I may get him to see things just as *we* do." The "we" of course meant herself and two friends.

The letter was written and sent in the course of the afternoon. She knew it would reach Madeline early the next morning—perhaps it might bring her and her brother over to assist in preparing her mind for any conflict of opinion that might arise in the course of the week to come. They did not

much like Mr. Morgan as a clergyman, she was aware; but they had often joined her at Church before, and she knew the old clergyman at Winyards did not find more favour with her friends. They, however, all consoled themselves in thinking that a good time was coming, when the Chapel at the Castle would be restored, and Cyprian (not *Father* Cyprian there, only so to the ladies of the Refuge and Sisterhood), duly ordained, would conduct the services as chaplain to Gwendoline's household, and otherwise find means and opportunities of enlightening the world, and showing (that part of it, at least) more than they ever knew before. With such dreams and anticipations, Gwendoline sought her chamber that night.

The storm had already risen high, but in that inland situation they could form no idea of the terrific nature of the tempest which was at that moment sweeping along the coast, and

carrying ruin and desolation in its course. Still, there was sufficient force in the wind to shake the old Castle walls whilst the storm broke over them. Gwendoline would not own herself frightened in any measure, so shut herself up in her own room, declining the companionship of Maude and of Mrs. Nelson. As Maude had no particular character for strength of mind to keep up, and had no friends to whom she felt it her duty to confess her short-comings in that or other respects, she was very glad to get Mrs. Nelson to sit with her till the fury of the tempest had subsided. When they parted, Maude said,

"I have been thinking of Louis, Mrs. Nelson. I trust he has not been at sea this night."

"There is no danger, I should think, for him in the yacht he describes, my dear. Besides, ten to one Mr. Beaumont is on shore at this very moment."

And so he was; for at that very time he was being conveyed by stranger hands to his mother's house, she walking at the head of the mournful procession. The next day came, bright and clear after the tempest, and early after breakfast, before they started for church, a little rough Welsh pony appeared in the chair which always brought Madeline, driven by her brother, to the Castle. Madeline, after a hasty recognition of Maude and Mrs. Nelson, walked up to Gwendoline, and taking both her hands, kissed her on the brow, and asked,

"All well, Gwendoline, with you?"

"Oh! yes. It was rather a fearful night, but I did not shrink from the contemplation; and I hope it did me good."

"No doubt, dear one; and yet I have been much troubled about you in my visions last night."

(Miss Winyard's dreams were always reported as visions.)

"No, were you, Madeline? What did you dream about me? Nothing very bad, I hope?"

"Well, I had a vision, and a very singular one." Then she drew Gwendoline into the recess of the window, and spoke quite low, saying, "I saw you out in the storm, exposed to its full fury, and I was in a sort of tower, from which I could not reach you; but you were hastily making for the river (near here, you know), and I thought it was swollen till it almost resembled the sea; and you were holding out your hands to some one who was struggling with the waves, but all in vain! He was carried away by other hands than yours, and disappeared, and then you turned your steps, weary and fainting, to the tower, and I came down and let you in, and you said, 'I will abide here for ever now with you, Madeline. The stream has been too strong for me—it has taken away my earthly love;

but this is a strong tower, and I will seek peace and tranquillity in its shelter for evermore—' "

"Well," said Gwendoline, as her friend paused, "was there nothing more?"

"Nothing. I woke as I held out my hands to guide you in, and found it was daylight, but I slept no more."

"Who was it that disappeared, Madeline?" asked Gwendoline, trembling.

"I did not see the face—it was hidden from me."

"But I see what you mean, Madeline. Oh! if he should be in danger!"

"Under any circumstances there is an obvious interpretation to the vision."

"Are you two coming to church, or are you going to stay and gossip there all the morning?" asked Maude, rather irreverently, as Miss Winyard thought.

"We are coming. I must run and get ready," said Gwendoline, emerging from the

recess with heightened colour and a quivering lip.

"You have been frightening the poor child, Madeline?" asked Maude. Then, as there was no answer, she continued, "That dreadful storm last night has shaken all our nerves a little. We shall, I daresay, be all the better for a bracing walk over the hills. I think your brother has already betaken himself that way."

"Yes; he said he should go as soon as we had seen Gwendoline, and heard that all was well here. We are both a little uncomfortable about her in consequence of my vision of the night past."

"Oh! I wonder you are not too sensible to dream dreams and see visions, Madeline. You magnify the evil, when it comes, by having a taste of it before it happens; and if it does not, why, all your trouble is vain."

"I do not agree with you, Maude," said Miss Winyard, coldly. "We are not, however,

left to choose for ourselves in such matters. It is only those of a peculiar temperament and frame of mind that are the recipients of such revelations. I am so qualified to a very high degree, but have no merit of my own because of the high distinction, and, believe me, it is not always a pleasurable one. I see that Gwendoline, as her mind strengthens and develops, is likely to become a fitting subject for them. I recognised that at once when we first visited the tapestry-room, and you referred to the supernatural event that occurred to her there. But I do not think you need distress yourself on the subject, for I am very much mistaken if you are ever likely to see a spirit."

"I am sure I am very thankful for that, Madeline, and as Gwendoline is coming downstairs, we may as well join her in the hall."

The three young ladies walked out of the house together; the only gentleman having

deserted them, and walked on before, probably with the intention of looking in upon some of his own peculiar worshippers at the Refuge and the Sisterhood. They walked on silently, for the minds of all were busy, and their thoughts pre-occupied. As they approached the village road, which led directly to the church, they encountered a man on horseback, riding quickly, and who passed them, taking the by-road they had left. Neither Gwendoline nor Madeline paid much attention to the man, and walked on, but Maude stopped behind, and looking intently at him, hurried after her companions, and, with a blanched face and trembling lips, said,

"That is one of the telegraph messengers. I have seen him here before. He is taking the road to the Castle. Let us go back at once."

Madeline directed a long, searching glance towards Gwendoline, saying, under her breath,

"I knew it. The thing has been revealed to me! Her trial is come upon her, as mine did; but, oh! not with such intensity!"

(Who ever did believe that others have felt the same bitterness of anguish as themselves, let their sorrows be ever so similar?) Then, as she hastened up and took Gwendoline's arm within her own to support her, the poor girl turned with a look of despair to her friend, and just whispered,

"And I could not believe you, Madeline. Oh! what can it be?"

"Perhaps nothing at all," said Maude, rallying her spirits. "Just a note to say, 'Expect me this evening,' for you, Gwen; or it may be for me, which is very probable, from a friend of mine, and something equally laconic and interesting. Oh! why should we frighten ourselves in this dreadful way?" And then Maude broke down, and began to cry; and poor Gwendoline, half frantic with fear, rushed on with headlong speed.

They soon reached the Castle, panting and terrified at all their imaginations had been conjuring up on the road. In the hall they were met by Mrs. Nelson, who, pale as themselves, and almost as trembling, said,

"Come in here, my dears. Don't frighten yourselves so; all may be well, but there is unpleasant news just arrived." She pointed to the telegram she held in her hand. Maude snatched it from her, and read:—

"*From Lady Cunliffe to Mrs. Nelson.*

"*Mr. Beaumont dangerously hurt and ill. Break the news, and let them come at once.*"

In an hour's time they were on the road.

CHAPTER XV.

"HE lives, he breathes, but that is all. I dare not say more, for there is but little hope, my dears. I will not deceive you."

Those were the first words addressed by Lady Cunliffe to the two sorrowing girls, who came straight to her house, according to the direction on the telegram. It was late on that Sunday evening when they found themselves at that melancholy journey's end; for they had met with delays on the road, and trains ran perversely on the Sunday, or not at all, in various places. All the history, as far as it could be told, of that unexpected and disastrous shipwreck, was related to them by Lady Cunliffe, who dwelt

much and feelingly upon the fact that Louis's being rescued at all from such a sea that night was hardly short of a miracle. "And," she added, "we may humbly hope and believe, in answer to his poor mother's ceaseless cares and prayers——"

"His *mother?*" exclaimed Maude, the name so new and strange for the first time escaping her lips, with an allusion to her own.

"Yes, my dear Miss Beaumont, it is no time for false delicacy and concealments. They have gone on too long, but there was no human hand concerned in bringing about their meeting at last! It was the hand of One higher and mightier that brought him home to his mother, though she, poor, weak, fragile creature as she is, went out, in all the storm and fury of the tempest, to try to help him, for I had met him (accidentally it was), and knew it was the vessel he was in that was in that deadly peril. Oh!

my dear Miss Beaumont, it is your own mother who is now watching beside him, as he lies there, for life or death!"

Maude's heart was becoming very soft under the various influences which had of late assailed it, and the sweet, almost forgotten name came back with a breath of childhood in it, and tender recollections and associations, that almost surprised herself. She just murmured,

"My poor mother! Oh, Lady Cunliffe, take me to her! We have been too long separated. Oh, I shall be so thankful to have a mother of my own!"

The kind-hearted little widow shed tears of joy as Maude said this, but begged that she and Gwendoline would delay their visit to the next day. She had everything prepared for their stay at her house, if they would consent to be her guests during the time.

There could be no objection made to this

friendly proposal, so the two forlorn girls settled themselves at once in Lady Cunliffe's cottage, which had the advantage of being very near to that occupied by Mrs. Maxwell, and from whence Lady Cunliffe received constant tidings of the sick man's state. There was not much to encourage—still that the suspended animation had in any degree been restored was enough to build hope upon. It seems so impossible for youth not to hope whilst life remains, and Maude and her cousin by degrees begun to feel as if all must be well at last. They had a very genial reception, too, from Sophy Wheeler. Confirmed invalid though she was, there were days when she brightened up and seemed to take a more lively interest in those about her than she had ever done in the days of her health. She had much, too, to tell both the girls that was interesting to them, in having so lately seen and talked with Louis. She was careful to say nothing

that might be painful for either of them to hear, or to give Gwendoline an idea that she was not, and never had been, the first object in her cousin's heart.

"Poor girl," thought she, "she will have enough sorrow to bear if he dies, as it seems likely enough he will; it would be a pity that any recollection of him should be painful!"

She took care, however, without making any special confession to clear Ruth of any ill that she might have hinted against her in former days, and did full justice to the noble unselfishness of her character, and whilst doing so poor Sophy felt more comfortable in her own mind, and in making that amends, no doubt experienced the novel sensation with a mixture of surprise and satisfaction. From Lady Cunliffe Maude heard for the first time the story of her mother's past life, in all that concerned her second marriage and widowhood.

She adverted feelingly, but slightly, to what Mrs. Maxwell had suffered in being separated from, and, as she believed, renounced by her children, and her reasons, or rather the apprehensions which deterred her from announcing her vicinity when she came the preceding year to live at Castleford.

Maude shed tears as she listened, and then said,

"I would have gone to her at once, Lady Cunliffe, if I had but known. How very sad it seems—our poor mother so near, and yet hiding, as it were, from Louis and me, her own children!"

Maude had been very young at the time of her separation from her mother, and had happily heard and known but little of her uncle's injudicious comments and unkind conduct on the occasion; she had been also kept in ignorance of all particulars concerning their mother since she grew up, as her brother never cared to mention the subject.

She had only been told that she had willingly deserted her children, to make an unworthy marriage. Then, for the first time, did she hear that assertion almost indignantly refuted by Lady Cunliffe, who spoke also most feelingly of the good and charming qualities of the man whom Maude's mother had married, and who had previously been her own sister's husband, and was the father of her niece Ruth.

It was perhaps fortunate both for Maude and Gwendoline that these disclosures were so full of interest that they kept their minds from dwelling too incessantly on Louis's dangerous state. They were already cherishing hope on his account, and were only longing most impatiently for the next day, when they might see him, and be acknowledged by the mother whom Maude was now passionately longing to claim. She wiled away part of the long intervening night in writing to John Penrose, and telling him all that

was in her heart. How sweet it seemed that there was now one to whom she could turn on all occasions of joy or sorrow, with a full sense of being understood, and knowing how deeply that one felt with and for her.

The next day came, and as early as they dared, the two girls presented themselves trembling with hope and fear at Mrs. Maxwell's door. It seemed they were expected, for the servant-maid showed them without speaking into the sitting-room close by. How strange it seemed to both to be there, so near and yet so sadly separated from the brother of the one, and lover of the other; and yet they were both too fully aware of the critical nature of the invalid's state, to show any impatience at such delay as might be thought necessary. Nor would they even plead to be admitted to his presence one moment before it was considered safe for him to hazard the interview.

Gwendoline sat down on the nearest chair, she felt very faint, and Maude was trembling visibly with suppressed excitement from various causes, so that she was quite unable to help or support her. Almost immediately after their arrival Ruth came into the room, bringing with her that peculiar atmosphere of support and comfort, which the sorrowful so often experienced in her presence. She went up to both the girls and kissed them tenderly; they had never seemed so dear to Ruth before, though she had always liked them much. To Gwendoline she appeared especially drawn, and whispered words of hope and comfort; after which she performed little kindly services for her—taking off her hat and gloves, and making her lie down on the sofa, saying,

"You will be better able to bear the sight if you recover yourself a little; he will not know you yet, but we trust he will ere long."

Poor Gwendoline's heart was relieved of a great unspoken burden, for she feared she should have been forbidden to see her cousin —that her rights as his betrothed wife might be set aside, and others might take upon themselves the holy offices of watching and nursing him, to her exclusion. Now she felt that Ruth deferred to her as his intended wife; and a certain jealous feeling died away, as she found that Ruth had not seen him herself since he had been taken into his mother's room. So Gwendoline felt quite disposed to lean on Ruth, with a full assurance that all she advised would be for the best, and consistent with the tenderest care for her own peculiar sufferings, as well as those of the dearly-loved one. When Gwendoline appeared better and less agitated, Ruth turned her attention to Maude, who had retained her place in the armchair, where she had thrown herself on entering. Ruth went up to her and whispered,

"Is there anything I can do for you, Miss Beaumont? There is no one but the nurse with your brother. When do you and Miss Powys like to go up? Shall I show you the way?"

Maude raised her head, which had rested on her clasped hands as Ruth spoke, and looked up in the sweet anxious face. Then as Ruth bent down to her, she stole her arms round her neck, and said,

"Oh Ruth! are not we sisters?—and shall not we treat each other as such from this time forth?"

Ruth started, and a little flush came into her face, as she looked wistfully at Maude, and hardly seemed to comprehend her. But Maude went on, hardly observing the expression—

"Yes! your mother is my mother—my own dear mother, but I only knew it last night from Lady Cunliffe, or I should have been with her long ago!"

Ruth gave utterance to a little suppressed cry of joy, even in the midst of all their sorrow—joy that one child should be brought home at last to its longing parent—and she clasped her hands in an attitude of earnest thanksgiving as she answered,

"Is it possible? Oh, my poor mother! —oh! the comfort, the support it will be to her! If she could but have known this long ago!"

"I hope to be a comfort to her yet, Ruth, though I can never be what you have been all these long years to her. Now, let me go at once, if she will see me."

"I have just left her to lie down and try to sleep," said Ruth, "for she has never rested all the night; but since the respiration has become more regular (I mean your brother's), and the medical men have left for an hour or two, I have persuaded her to lie down; but I very much doubt if she sleeps."

"Oh, take me with you, Ruth! I want my mother—I must go to *her!*" And then the two stole quietly out of the room, leaving Gwendoline on the sofa, waiting patiently till it would be advisable for her to see her cousin.

Ruth stopped before the door of the room where Mrs. Maxwell was lying down; her son was still in her own room. Maude held Ruth's arm for a moment.

"She will require preparation; you had better go in first, and tell her that Maude is come to her at last."

"I will tell her as you wish; but I think you may come at once—she has always been expecting you and your brother. I did not at one time understand the look, but I have since; she has had that expression ever since we came to Castleford."

"Poor mother! and no one came!" sighed Maude.

"Come now," answered Ruth, opening the door, "she is awake. Mother, your child

Maude is come—she is here, and longing to see you."

Ruth led Maude a little way into the room, and pointed to the couch where her mother lay, and then withdrew gently, closing the door behind her. Maude went up at once to the bed, and knelt down by it, and for the first time since she was a little child, gazed into her mother's face—that poor, pale, faded, but still sweet, loving face. Who can express the joy there was for both in that re-union?

Mrs. Maxwell seemed as if she could never gaze sufficiently into that beautiful face, in which she tried to trace the baby-features she had so dearly loved; and how often did she clasp her child's soft, fair hands, and press them to her lips! and yet there was so little said by either. Maude only kept repeating the fond name "Mother—*my* mother!—oh! how strange, and yet it is true! Dearest mother, can you love me?"

"I have never ceased to do so, my darling. Oh! if *both* my children are restored to me at once!—oh! the greatness of the mercy and the blessing!"

In little incoherent sentences, the mother and daughter talked at first; but, as they became calmer, they dwelt more at large on all the terrible events of the preceding night, and wept together over the apprehensions they hardly dared to talk of. At last Maude said, looking on the pale, transparent hands she held in hers,

"Mother, I am sure you must be terribly worn out, and must suffer from all the fearful excitement. Do lie down and rest a little, and let me sit by you."

"No, dearest, I do not like to close my eyes, and lose the sight of you, and fear lest you should vanish in a dream. I am quite rested. We will go and see *him*, if you can bear the sight."

"Is Louis so much altered?" whispered Maude.

"I only saw him as he is now," answered the mother, with a deep sigh.

"I forgot," answered Maude. "But is he no better than when you first brought him in?"

"Yes, a shade, for now he lives and breathes; but oh! life is at so low an ebb that any moment it may cease." And then there went up a sorrowful cry to heaven that Louis Beaumont's life might be rendered back to him. "Will you come?" asked the mother, who could not restrain her longing anxiety to be with both her children once more. But Maude hesitated, and drew back a little, and then whispered—

"Let Gwen go and see him first—she will be hurt if she is the last."

"Go, then, dear, and call her, if you think so. I fear there can be but little comfort in the interview at present, but go, dear."

"Will not you come too, mamma?"

It was then Mrs. Maxwell's turn to shrink

as she answered, "Your cousin does not know me, and Louis has not yet acknowledged me, so perhaps she would rather go alone."

"Not she!" exclaimed Maude. "Oh! mother, our Gwen is the very sweetest and kindest of human beings; she will indeed be a daughter to you. You will have three, mamma."

A faint smile stole over Mrs. Maxwell's wasted face, but she shook her head gently and murmured,

"It was all her father's doing; she may inherit the feeling."

"I will answer for Gwendoline," said Maude firmly. "Why, she was the one who always cared the most for Ruth, but I love her dearly now too."

"You cannot love her more than she deserves, Maude dearest; and I think you also know and like her friend and connexion, Mr. Penrose?"

"I do, mother," answered Maude, with a quick blush. "And I love him too. I will tell you at once we are engaged."

"That is a happy hearing, my dearest child. He is our best and kindest friend."

"Yes, we shall be all one happy family together," replied Maude, caressing her mother's hand, and adding, "when our dear one there recovers. Now I will go down and bring up Gwen to see you."

When Maude went down, still in a whirl of excitement, she found Ruth sitting by Gwen, and both talking very earnestly together; so she came near and sat down, quietly waiting till their conversation should come to an end. Ruth acknowledged her presence by a quiet though somewhat sad smile, and Gwendoline looked up, with some of her ordinary brightness, and said,

"How strange it all seems! But we are three sisters now, are not we, Ruth?"

"Oh! yes; if you are disposed to admit

me as one, I shall be only too glad," said Ruth, with ready acquiescence.

"Have you seen Louis?" asked Gwen, turning to her cousin.

"No; we thought you would like to go first, in case he may not be able to bear more," answered Maude.

Gwen got up with a certain air of satisfaction, in the midst of all her grief, and prepared to follow Ruth upstairs.

"You must see my mother first," said Maude, as they reached the top of the stairs, and she led Gwendoline to the door of her room.

The gentle tap was answered by Mrs. Maxwell herself, who, pale and agitated, waited for Gwen's recognition.

"My dear aunt, how glad I am to know you at last! And—and I hope to call you mother, too, very soon," said Gwen, in the little speech she had unconsciously prepared on her way upstairs.

Mrs. Maxwell folded the girl in her arms and kissed her very tenderly—for she was to be her son's wife if he lived—and replied,

"God grant it, my dear child, and restore him to you. You will wish to see him at once, no doubt."

Gwen only bent her head in reply, for there was a choking sensation in her throat, and a mist before her eyes, which prevented her either seeing or speaking; but she pressed Mrs. Maxwell's hand in hers, and made a sign that she was ready.

Mrs. Maxwell drew Gwen's hand into her own, and they passed through the little dressing-room, and entered the darkened chamber which adjoined.

CHAPTER XVI.

GWENDOLINE approached with a mingled feeling of awe and sense of unreality. She could hardly believe that it was her cousin, her engaged lover—he whom she had last seen in the full vigour of health and strength, that she believed lay there, silent, motionless, and, to all appearance, passing through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. The gloom which reigned through the darkened room prevented Gwendoline from distinctly discerning any object, but, as her eyes became more accustomed to the dubious light, she perceived that the form stretched in that death-like slumber was like a marble figure of the Louis she had parted with six months

ago. The features were set and pallid, and the brow bound up, there being a wound on the forehead caused by a blow from some sharp substance whilst in the water. The hands and arms were stretched out helplessly—even as a strong man lays himself out to die; there seemed to be no life in or hope for him.

As Gwendoline slowly realized all this, she threw herself on her knees by the sick man's side, and burst into a passionate fit of weeping and lamentation. She had not before at all realized the extent of the danger. Then a figure rose up tall and dusk from the farther side of the bed (it was only the nurse), and she took hold of Gwendoline with quiet decision, lifted her up on to her feet, and carried her into the next room, shut the door, and then she said,

"Pardon me, madam, but this is a most critical case of life or death; the least hurry

or agitation may cause that feeble heart to stop for ever. Mr. Beaumont must be kept in the most extreme quietness till we see which way the scales may turn."

"Oh! you are the nurse, I see," said Gwendoline, still sobbing, and, like a child, refusing to be comforted. "Oh! do tell me, will he die?—can he ever recover?"

"I cannot tell you, madam. That he is alive now, is nothing short of a miracle; but for that good lady's (his mother, I believe) wonderful care and precautions that first night, it had all been over in an hour or two—indeed, they tell me that all who saw him as he lay on the beach, supposed they saw a dead drowned man."

"Were you there?" asked Gwendoline, wishing to hear more.

"Oh no! madam, the great London man, Dr. Harman, brought me down with him. I have an attendant, too, but she only comes up when I ring. It is a case that requires

the most skilful hands in the nursing department."

"Oh! nurse, if you can but bring him round, there is nothing in this world I would not give you—and I have plenty of money."

"Thank you, madam," said the majestic-looking nurse, a little stiffly; "I always do my best, with or without reward. You are his sister, I suppose?"

"No," replied Gwendoline, with a little blush—"I am not his sister, only his cousin, but I hope to be his wife also some day; so, you see, I have a very near and dear interest in his recovery."

"God help you, then, my dear young lady!" said the nurse, kindly, but with an expression of pity in her eyes that said but little for her hopes in this sad case.

Mrs. Maxwell was always allowed to remain in her son's room, for she was far too well disciplined to indulge in any outward

demonstration of feeling, and the nurse preferred the silent presence of that gentle woman (who could, at any moment, be a most useful assistant) to that of her kind attendant. Mrs. Maxwell was never obtrusive—never sought to exercise any authority, or seek to supersede that of the actual nurse in any way; she only quietly waited in the room and watched, when the nurse needed some repose or refreshment.

Gwendoline paid her daily visits at stated times, as the nurse or physician directed, and Maude was also admitted in her turn; but there was never the slightest sign of recognition on the part of the sufferer—it was all a dull, dark, despairing blank.

In a day or two after Maude's arrival, she was joined by Mr. Penrose, who had started the instant he had received her sad letter, and who took up his abode at the nearest inn. His presence was a great comfort and support not only to his be-

trothed, but to all the sorrowing friends and relations assembled there. To Mrs. Maxwell his coming was like a ray of sunshine, and seemed another link between herself and Maude. Not indeed that they required any fresh tie to unite them. Nothing could exceed the attachment that from the first moment of their meeting had sprung up between the long-separated mother and daughter. Still in John Penrose Mrs. Maxwell had long found a good and faithful friend; and as far as pleasure could exist in that much-tried heart, it was felt in the idea of his becoming the husband of that dearly-loved daughter. So, as far as could be, in that anxious household the family affairs went on well and pleasantly; but there was one in the midst of them all who seemed, in consequence of these events, to be cast to a greater distance, and to be more isolated than she had ever been before. Ruth was no longer the first object in Mrs. Maxwell's

life. It is true she owed most of the happiness of her former years, and the independence of later days, to Ruth's generous devotion, and she was not unmindful of it. But still though she loved Ruth very truly, it was not with the passionate devotion that she regarded Maude. She had always been to a certain degree undemonstrative in the expression of her regard for Ruth; and possibly the step-daughter had been the most loving of the two. Perhaps it was only natural, but the girl had clung to her and lavished on her the whole treasure of her young love.

It was a trying position for Ruth. A weak and selfish woman would have become morbidly jealous, and have been always on the look out for causes of offence and complaint. It was not so with Ruth. She wisely, and as if it were but natural, seemed content to take at once the second place in her step-mother's heart. It might be she had never

really filled any other, though her acquaintance with the Beaumonts had given her a sort of fictitious importance in Mrs. Maxwell's eyes. Then the discovery of poor Ruth's attachment to her son, ill-fated as it was, had excited a feeling of the deepest tenderness and sympathy in the mother's heart.

But that was all at an end then. If Louis Beaumont ever recovered, it would be to become the husband of his cousin Gwendoline; so on her were now turned all the interest and affection that belonged to such a prospect, with the deepest commiseration for the uncertainty in which it was involved. So Gwendoline became very dear to Mrs. Maxwell, who seemed to forget the wrongs she had suffered at her father's hands; whilst her tender love for her late husband, and deep sorrow for his loss (though never forgotten) were no longer the predominant sentiments of her heart.

They seemed gradually to recede into the far distance, and give place to nearer and more absorbing interests; and thus it was his daughter ceased to be the first consideration of Mrs. Maxwell's life.

Ruth would not dwell upon this painful idea—in fact, she never either clothed it in words to herself, or hinted it to others. She tried to shut her eyes to everything save the consciousness that the step-mother, so dear to her, was happy at last—at least, would be so if her son were given back to her, and for that event Ruth prayed with all the fervour of her noble, good heart. She was never invited to enter the sick-room, and the days passed by without her being able often to ascertain with any certainty the true state of his case. Maude and Gwendoline were most affectionate to her when they happened to be together, but they were both engrossed with their own absorbing concerns; and Ruth seemed

essential to no one. She spent the greater part of her time at Lady Cunliffe's, and there her coming and going was no matter of indifference, but the crowning comfort of the day to Miss Wheeler, who had long learned to look upon Ruth Maxwell as her best friend. Sophy, too, even at that late period of her closing life, was learning a lesson from Ruth, for she was conscious how she would have felt formerly had she been in her place, and had a lively sympathy with her on that account.

"I am sure I should have hated them all," said Sophy to herself as she marked how self-engrossed (perhaps very naturally) all her friends were, to the unintentional neglect of Ruth. Mr. Penrose even seemed to forget his old friend in the all-absorbing devotion of his love for Maude, and for all who belonged to her. Maude and Gwendoline established themselves in a small house under the chaperonage of Mrs. Nelson, close

by the Maxwells; and as Louis remained too ill to be moved, his mother was permitted to retain him in her own house, and continue her watchful, unremitting, anxious attendance. Thus the time went on, still waiting!—waiting!—and even hoping after the doctor told the watchers that the end might come any time. But yet the lamp of life burnt on. It seemed so loth to be extinguished, and so hope kept alive also.

It happened one day, when the two girls were out walking, with John Penrose for their escort, that Mrs. Maxwell, as usual, sat in Louis's darkened room. She was alone, for Ruth never entered it, and was then attending Sophy's chair on the jetty (where she had once seen Louis, and often recalled that day in the silent sorrow of her heart). Mrs. Maxwell occupied her usual place in that darkened room, where she always sat, silent and unoccupied, save for the busy thoughts which were ceaselessly

springing up in her mind, all—all tending to one point, the possible recovery of her son. Suddenly, to her intense surprise and delight, a voice was heard in the quiet room—and it said, "Mother, is that you?"

Oh! the joy of that sound; for she felt her son was about to be restored to her, and in that blessed moment he had called her "mother!" She hastened to his bed, and eagerly pressed her lips upon his wasted hand, whispering, as she did so,

"Yes, Louis, my dearest, it is I, your mother; and you are better, surely, now—you are able to speak once more!"

"Yes; but I feel very strange and weak, and I do not know what has happened, but I felt sure it was you watching by me. I must have seen you in my dreams, for I knew you in a moment. You look just as you did when you stood by me after the fire."

The poor overjoyed mother feared to

carry on the conversation, precious as each word was. She felt, now her son would be restored to her, that at last her earthly cup of happiness might be full to overflowing. She rang for the nurse, and she sent at once for the physician, to announce the joyful change. They came quickly; they saw the patient, but both looked grave.

"Such changes are not uncommon," said Dr. Harmer, "before a greater still. I cannot pronounce on this at present, but let him see his sister and Miss Powys, or anyone he wishes, if he names them."

It was a death-blow to the poor mother; for the first time her spirit sank entirely, and she left the room, and gave way to the bitterest fit of weeping that she had ever indulged in until that fatal day.

When Maude and Gwendoline came in, they were but too eager to avail themselves of the permission just given, but quite unable to make up their minds that the state of the

case was as critical as was feared by the more experienced ones. So they nursed hope, and in time they communicated some to the miserable mother. She crept back into the room more dear, more precious to her than ever. It seemed as if she could not resign her newly-recovered son. She sat down by him, and looked in his eyes. There was a strange, distant expression in them, but he started on seeing his mother by him, and held out a feeble hand.

"Kiss me, mother," said he, after a pause. "You forgive me all my long years of neglect—I know you do."

There was no occasion for that passionate assurance, which was sealed in a long, long, despairing kiss on those cold lips. After a time he looked round.

"Where is Ruth, mother?"

"Gwen, you mean, my dearest. Close by. She is waiting to come and see you, and so is Maude."

"Let them come," said Louis.

"Is that you, Gwen?" asked the feeble voice.

"Yes, Louis, dearest. Don't you know me?"

"Oh! yes, dear little cousin Gwen, my other sister!"

Gwendoline looked up with a little expression of alarm, and whispered,

"Oh! Louis, have you forgotten everything—our love, our engagement?"

"I have forgotten nothing, dear Gwen; my head is quite clear, but my sight seems failing. Kiss me now, and say good-bye."

Then Gwendoline obeyed, and with a strange sensation, half vexation and sorrow, and yet not devoid of hope, she hastened to her cousin.

"Oh! Maude, you may go in now; dearest Louis is certainly better. He speaks much more strongly, and knows us all; but he seems to have forgotten everything about our engagement." And then Gwendoline

burst into tears and said—"I am sure, if he wishes to forget it, I will never remind him of it."

Maude kissed and soothed her, and left her with assurances that such strange caprices were not uncommon, after such serious illnesses, but no doubt all would come right in time.

Maude went into the sick-room with a beating heart. She could understand Louis better than Gwendoline had done, for he spoke rationally, and for the first time since his accident, and so that his meaning could be followed. He said very little to Maude, only he hoped she would always live at Harewood. She would not contradict the fancy at that time, as she knew he was not aware of her engagement to John Penrose; so, with a feeble attempt at cheerfulness, she said,

"Yes, dear, with you and Gwen, till I go elsewhere."

"Never in that way, Maude dear; but kiss me, and don't be unhappy, for I see how much I have been to blame in all things; but I intended no harm, least of all to poor Gwen."

After that, Louis spoke no more whilst Maude remained in the room; and when she left him, she thought he slept, as he did; and then she went to cheer Gwendoline with the tidings that Louis was decidedly better, and she expected, when he woke from sleep, he would be better still. When he next awoke, his mother and the nurse were anxiously watching, and Dr. Harmer was sleeping in the house, to be summoned at a moment's notice. He had said he could not pronounce on the case for certain, but it was most critical. When Louis, then, opened his eyes, his mother came to him in a moment, whispering,

"We are to send for Dr. Harmer when you are quite awake; and you really look better now."

"Do I, mother? No, do not send for him just now. Let me see Ruth; she has never been near me yet, but it is not her fault, dear girl. Let the nurse go." Louis gasped for breath for a moment, and then said, imploringly, "Mother, send your best child here, that I may thank her."

Mrs. Maxwell was conscious of something like a sting in these words, for Louis, ill as he was, seemed to remember much that was taken as matter of course, or forgotten by everyone else. So Ruth came, pale, calm, and with that sweet, heavenly expression in her face that brought peace and comfort to the dying man. He held out his hand to her; she took it, and knelt down.

"Say a prayer for me, Ruth," said Louis; and when she rose, he talked to her of things not on earth. As she left him, he said, "I have never loved but you, Ruth, and I shall continue to do so till we meet in heaven."

Ruth restrained her tears, and then she imprinted one kiss on his pale lips, and left him for ever. He was still hers, hers for ever! When his mother and the nurse came back, he was again in a peaceful sleep, so they did not call Dr. Harmer.

From that sleep Louis Beaumont never woke; he passed quietly away. It was a gentle and peaceful ending to the stormy passage which had brought him there, and cut short his young life, for his days were not destined to be long in the land. They took him home, and there his mother went too. Her children brought her to their home at last.

CHAPTER XVII.

IT was hardly a month after Louis Beaumont had been laid in the family vault at Harefield before it opened again to receive his mother. She never held up her head, or recovered herself in any degree, after her son's death. She had so entirely believed that her prayers would be heard, and that the beloved one might have been given back to her. In this life that prayer was not to be granted. But possibly there was another answer to it, a different fulfilment, of far wider, deeper significance. The mother and son, so long separated in life, were brought together in death. They were laid side by side, and their souls happily united in eternity.

After Mr. Beaumont's death his sister came into possession of all the large property that had belonged to him. Louis had made no will, for he had purposely deferred it till the time of his marriage, and had fully intended executing one when in London—when other deeds and settlements had to be signed and sealed. Everything, therefore, without the least reservation, passed into Maude's hands; and never were large possessions and great wealth so sorrowfully received. The two quickly-succeeding deaths of that darling brother, and the mother she had just learned to love and value so dearly, caused her inexpressible grief. It seemed to Maude as if she could never recover any degree of cheerfulness, or be the same as in former days. But time did its healing work with her, like the rest of the world.

There were many of her friends and acquaintances who speculated rather curiously as to the effect this new and sudden acquisi-

tion of wealth might have on Miss Beaumont's matrimonial intentions. Maude was certainly in a position to make a brilliant marriage, if such had been in the least her desire; and, no doubt, had her altered circumstances led her to wish for any change, the power of making it would not have been wanting. But it happened that neither Miss Beaumont nor Mr. Penrose ever entertained such an idea for a moment. Maude knew well enough that John Penrose would rather have taken her as his wife without a shilling, that he might have had the delight of giving her everything she might fancy or desire, and she felt, too, that her accession of wealth was as distasteful to her lover as to herself. Still, as she could not disencumber herself of it, or give it back to him to whom all earthly possessions now were nothing, she was satisfied that it could, with herself, be placed in no worthier or dearer hands than John Penrose's. In all the sorrowful

time they had passed through together, they had become so well acquainted, and Maude had learnt to lean so entirely for comfort and support on her betrothed, that the idea of any worldly change of circumstances coming between them, would have appeared to Maude, as well as to her lover, simply impossible. That this was their unalterable conviction and resolution, became evident to all inquiring friends and neighbours, when, towards the close of the year of her double bereavement, Maude Beaumont became the wife of John Penrose. The purchase of Waterfells had been delayed, and was never accomplished, and on the return of the newly-wedded pair from their wedding-tour, they took up their abode at Harewood Park; and then, in deference to family feeling, Mr. Penrose assumed his wife's name in addition to his own.

It was not till the very day of Maude's marriage that Gwendoline left her. They

had passed their time of bitter mourning together, each in some measure supporting the other. Poor Gwendoline was inconsolable for the loss of her idolized cousin and affianced husband. Happily she knew nothing, and suspected less of his state of feeling in regard to herself and Ruth Maxwell. She had neither seen nor heard anything which could convey the knowledge of that which would have been so intensely painful to her affectionate heart; and fortunately Maude was as ignorant as her cousin of Louis's love for another; they were both spared that sad addition to their grief.

Thus in their sorrow the two girls clung together, till Maude was called upon to enter a new and happier stage of her existence. Then poor Gwendoline left Harewood, that happy home, and went back very sad and sore of heart, in company with her faithful friend, Mrs. Nelson, to her soli-

tary dwelling at Rhys Castle. She had felt but little heart of late to take much interest either in the Refuges or Sisterhoods so diligently established under the superintendence of Madeline Winyard and her brother Cyprian. As her zeal cooled in regard to them, she began to doubt, in consequence of some representations made to her, whether she had been as judicious in her manner of setting to work as might have been desired, and whether she had not rather too hastily admitted all sorts of applicants without due inquiry—not so much for their eligibility, as that the institutions might be speedily furnished with inmates. She was also led to doubt whether her friend Madeline had been altogether discreet in her advice to some young ladies and girls in their neighbourhood, by which they were induced to leave their home duties, and set off on a round of self-imposed avocations, either devised by themselves, or advised by

Miss Winyard and her handsome brother.

Soon after Gwendoline had left the place, Mr. Cyprian Winyard's duties relating to his intended profession took him elsewhere, and then Madeline found the zeal of the young lady devotees began considerably to abate, and her own energy was insufficient to carry on things at the Sisterhood as she desired. Several of the inmates began to tire of the wearying routine they had at first pursued so eagerly—there was no one to confess to, as Mr. Morgan utterly set his face against such practices, and by degrees Miss Powys's hastily-organized Sisterhood melted away, most of the girls returning home, and the others directing their energies elsewhere. Madeline took refuge amongst her friends at the Refuge, properly so called, but was hardly more successful there.

The fact was, Gwendoline had been induced by sensible people to place her affairs entirely in Mr. Lloyd's hands during the

time of her absence, and the result was that he curtailed the expenses, and consequently the supplies, so much at the Refuge, that it became no longer the luxurious and pleasant retreat the ladies there had hitherto found it. Miss Lloyd too looked in, and talked in her sensible, practical way to some of the inmates, offering to see about situations for some, and useful employment at home for others, advising them, whilst they were capable and able, to help themselves as far as they could, promising, in Miss Powys's name, every assistance in case of illness or real destitution. All that Gwendoline had at first planned and judiciously advised, and had submitted to Louis for his approval, was carefully carried out by the faithful agent, and Madeline, without being deposed from her high position, simply found herself alone in her glory, and bereft of her subjects.

All this had gradually taken place in

Gwendoline's absence, and on her return home she found things in the state described.

The village hospital was flourishing; schools and almshouses doing their duty in teaching the poor children, and sheltering the aged and destitute; and Mr. Lloyd, on the abdication of the Refugees, had ventured to re-open the little quiet inn, so long known as "The Bard," taking good care that the concession should not be abused. Thus Gwendoline, on her return, found her little kingdom more flourishing than she had left it, and rejoiced in the midst of her sadness accordingly.

There was one great change which caused Gwendoline much regret and some little consternation, and that was the permament absence of her friend Madeline from her own home, and from the neighbourhood altogether. Miss Winyard had found the taste of power so sweet during her short reign at

Rhys, that she was quite unsettled and altogether indisposed for the ordinary routine of home occupations after she was obliged to return thither. It was a grievous disappointment to see all her pet projects melting away into thin air, and becoming as baseless as the generality of her dreams had proved themselves. She blamed Gwendoline for allowing the interference of her sensible agent, and had addressed a letter of lively remonstrance on the subject. But Gwendoline's imagination had become sobered by sorrow, and she had heard enough of the true state of her "Institutions" not to feel that Mr. Lloyd had shown more sense in his management of them, and all other things committed to his charge, than her friend had done. She began to see, too, there was something morbid and abnormal in the way that Madeline's sorrow (of a similar nature to her own) had been manifested; so she was no longer inclined to be a puppet in her

hands, and gently intimated her change of opinion.

Madeline, finding herself thwarted on all sides, turned her energies in another direction. She could no longer confine them to her own private performances; so she determined to accept a pressing invitation from a friend she had made whilst abroad, and who was the head of a Roman Catholic establishment in the south of France, and thither she had betaken herself at the time of Gwendoline's return.

It was a great grief to her family that Madeline had so determined, but she had too long followed the erratic course of her own inclinations to be impressed by any remonstrances on their part. There was one member of her family who felt Madeline's secession, more deeply, perhaps, than the rest, and that was her brother Cyprian, who could not but be aware that he had greatly aided in unsettling her mind, and had help-

ed to lead her further astray. During the time of his absence from home, a considerable change had come over his own opinions and practices. Several things had contributed to bring this about; one of the most effective being that he had been thrown much into the society of a clergyman of the highest views and firmest principles, exemplified by his religious conduct in every department of life. This man was a church dignitary, of undisputed talents and great acquirements, and, withal, endowed with such genuine humility and kindness of heart that he was approachable to all who needed his help or advice. This clergyman had taken a warm interest in Cyprian Winyard, as a young man to be rescued from his own misdirected devices, and withal so naturally good and high-minded as to be well worth any effort on his part. Happily, the young man reciprocated the feeling of friendship, and felt grateful for the interest shown

towards him by one of such high standing and reputation.

On this part of his life it is unnecessary to say more than that a great and beneficial change dated from this period in Cyprian's ways of thinking and acting in many particulars. He had been presented with a curacy in the immediate neighbourhood of his home, soon after his sister Madeline withdrew herself from thence. The brother and sister had previously met, but to no good purpose. Cyprian tried in vain to modify Madeline's opinions, and persuade her to remain at home—all in vain! She, on her part, reproached her brother with what she called his dereliction of all right views, and what had once been his decided convictions.

They neither of them convinced the other, but both went their separate ways, lamenting each other's apostacy. Cyprian's return to his home and his sober senses was

no small comfort to the General and his wife, who had always regarded him with special affection and admiration. They had both judiciously abstained from any interference in his previous opinions and practices. The good General observing to his wife—

"Let him and his crotchets alone, Mary. If the boy comes to his senses, it will not be in consequence of anything we can say to him. Give him his head, till a wiser hand is able to hold and manage him. He is like a young horse—full of tricks before he is broken in, he will not be the worse man for it hereafter. There is plenty of good in him."

After all, the young man did come home, cured, for the most part, of all that was fantastic and unreal in his religious profession, and deeply confirmed in all that was good and true. It was about the same time Gwendoline took up her abode at her own

home. She was glad to renew her friendship with the Winyard family, though Madeline was no longer with them. There was, however, a slight sensation of relief in being no longer so completely under the control (however delicately veiled) of another, and of being so perpetually urged on to a course of action, of which the result seemed sometimes rather dubious. Still Gwendoline had loved Madeline, and grieved for her absence. Kate Winyard appeared almost naturally to fall into the vacant place, and Cyprian was also ready to return into his former one.

It need not be said that he no longer affected to fill that of spiritual father and general dictator to the young heiress, it was only the old interest and family friendship that remained. There had always been a certain degree of reserve observed in the acquaintance of Cyprian and Gwendoline. At the time it had been formed, she was

engaged to be married, and he had considered himself devoted to the ascetic life of a monk, whilst filling the position of an English clergyman. These barriers were now done away with—Gwendoline was single and disengaged, and Cyprian, no monk in heart or intention, and more fully alive than ever to all that had always made Miss Powys so peculiarly lovely in his eyes. It was that appreciation that had made Cyprian, in former days, retreat behind a double fortification of reserve and austerity. All that was doubtless changed, but Cyprian, the more hopelessly he felt himself to be falling in love, the more did he feel and fear the other impediments which lay in the way of his successful wooing. That he, with nothing to offer but himself and his curacy, should presume to propose to marry the heiress of Rhys Castle, seemed presumptuous imbecility and impertinence on his part. Besides, he fancied, though Gwen-

doline liked him very well in his general capacity and clerical calling, she might think very differently when called upon to view him in the light of a lover. It is true that Gwendoline, since her sorrowful bereavement, had never thought it possible that any man should ever again fill the place in her heart that poor Louis had done; and yet—she had hardly ever realized how little there had been of devotion, or even of sympathy, on his part towards her during the time of their engagement. Her own trusting imagination had supplied all that was wanting in her betrothed; whilst her friends, in engrossing her every thought, and moulding her actions to their own ideas of what was right and proper to be done, had been the motive power of all her intended good deeds; in fact, the Winyards had had much more part in Gwendoline's life after her engagement and residence

in her own home than Louis had ever cared to have.

It was natural, therefore, for Gwendoline to turn to Cyprian at various times for that advice and sympathy which he was but too ready to give; and thus, whilst she believed her whole affections were with the dead, a considerable portion of her regard was also bestowed upon the living. It was part of Gwendoline's nature to lean on some one. She delighted in being led by a mind she considered superior to her own. Much that had occurred in her past history had been the result of that pre-disposition.

Thus things went on for a year after Gwendoline's return home, and she recovered her cheerfulness, and found more quiet happiness in various ways than she could ever have believed it possible could have fallen to her lot, after all she had suffered. Then there came a change, or, at least, a threatened one, over the spirit of that happy dream.

Cyprian received the offer of a valuable living in a large parish in a distant part of England. It was a very desirable piece of preferment for any young man, and flattering to him to whom the presentation was offered. It came to Cyprian through his friend, the clergyman to whose efforts he had formerly been so much indebted. All his family were pleased, and congratulations flowed in, and no one doubted but that the offer would meet with a ready acceptance.

Kate Winyard was the one first to detect the lurking doubt and difficulty that presented itself to her brother's mind. He had never spoken to her or any mortal being of the subject of his love, but Kate had not been slow to read his secret. She said but little the day he received the offer, but before he had finally closed with it, she came behind his chair, as he sat deep in thought, and passing her arm round his neck, whispered,

"Before you write, go and tell Gwen—she must not hear of it from anyone but you."

Cyprian was about to reply, "It will be time enough when I have accepted," but it so happened that Gwendoline herself rode over that morning, and then for the first time heard the family news.

It was with a strange sensation of regret that Miss Powys heard of her friend's unexpected piece of good-fortune, and she could not help exclaiming to him, "And then you will leave us all?"

After she had said that, Gwendoline turned uncomfortably red, and feared she had said something she had much better not have done. However, Kate having left the room, the two remaining in it were quite free to discuss the subject in all its bearings. Need it be said how that discussion ended? After a long, long talk, Gwendonline went home to consider all that Cyprian had said to her,

and to think how far it would be right in her to forget all the sorrowful past, or to let Cyprian Winyard lose such an opening as now was presented to his acceptance.

The next day he called for his answer. The moment of meeting was rather an anxious one, but he saw at once that her self-communing had been in his favour. So they each agreed to give up something. Cyprian wrote to refuse the proffered living in the far distant county, having, happily, better prospects so much nearer home; and Gwendoline was prevailed upon to bury the dead past, and become the wife of Cyprian Winyard.

There was one woman, however, who never did bury that past—it always remained as a cherished reality to Ruth Maxwell. She lived on quietly in her own house at Castleford, keeping up pleasant sisterly relations with the Beaumonts at Harewood. Much of her time was devoted to her aunt, Lady

Cunliffe, who felt very lonely after the death of poor Sophy, which took place shortly after their return to The Bower. She is still unmarried, and has never forgotten the first, and last, and only love she ever entertained. Those who know her best say she will always remain Ruth Maxwell!

THE END.

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